

RICE UNIVERSITY

**The Slaveholding Crisis: The Fear of Insurrection, the Wilmot Proviso, and the
Southern Turn Against American Exceptionalism**

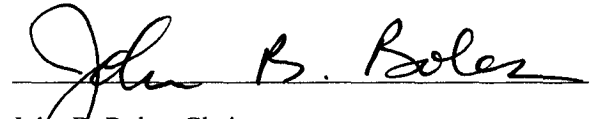
by

Carl Lawrence Paulus

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy

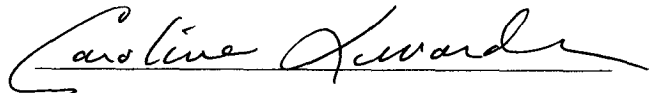
Approved, Thesis Committee:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John B. Boles", written over a horizontal line.

John B. Boles, Chair,
William P. Hobby Professor of History

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "W. Caleb McDaniel", written over a horizontal line.

W. Caleb McDaniel
Assistant Professor of History

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Caroline Levander", written over a horizontal line.

Caroline Levander
Carlson Chair in the School of Humanities Vice
Provost for Interdisciplinary Initiatives

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eric H. Walther", written over a horizontal line.

Eric H. Walther
Professor of History, University of Houston

Houston, Texas

April 2012

Abstract

The Slaveholding Crisis: The Fear of Insurrection, the Wilmot Proviso, and the Southern Turn Against American Exceptionalism

by

Carl Lawrence Paulus

On December 20, 1860, South Carolinians voted to abandon the Union and sparked the deadliest war in American history. Led by a proslavery movement that viewed Abraham Lincoln's place at the helm of the federal government as a real and present danger to the security of the South's system of slavery, southerners—both slaveholders and nonslaveholders—willingly risked civil war by seceding from the United States. Rather than staying within the fold of the Union and awaiting the new president's conduct regarding slavery in the territories and in the slave states, secessionists took bold action to change their destiny. By acting on their expectations of what the new president would do instead of waiting for his actual policy initiatives, they wagered on the possibility of a different future. This dissertation contends that the southern fear of slave insurrection, which was influenced by the Haitian Revolution, and the belief that northern antislavery forces would use violent uprising to end southern slavery shaped the planter ethos over the arc of the antebellum period, affecting national politics. Furthermore, this project explains why secessionists viewed Abraham Lincoln's support of the Wilmot Proviso as a valid reason for disunion.

Acknowledgements

I wish to show my gratitude for everyone who has played a vital role in assisting me in completing this dissertation. Projects like this are years in the making. The first person I would like to thank is my mother. Being a single parent with a small child is not an easy task. Being a single parent and going to night school is doubly tough. The long nights when I watched her pound away on the typewriter showed me the value of getting a degree, and I have no doubt that she is one of the reasons I went to graduate school. My stepfather also played a crucial role in how I approached my education. His example made me want to become writer and historian. My sister Kathryn also encouraged me when I needed it and put up with me when I did not. The love and support of my family was invaluable throughout the entire process.

I am also grateful for the incredible support of Rice University and the History Department. The financial support offered to me, through the stipend and for research trips and conferences, proved vital to my scholarship. I owe a huge thank you to the administrative staff: Paula Platt, Lisa Tate, Rachel Zepeda, and Anita Smith. When I had a question, they were always helpful in providing the right direction. Carl Caldwell and Edward Cox were both very generous and understanding directors of graduate studies, and their advice was greatly appreciated. I gained much as a Rice graduate student from Carl Caldwell, Ira Gruber, Kerry Ward, Lora Wildenthal, Stephanie Camp, Doug Brinkley, and Kathryn de Luna. Rebecca Goetz showed me how I should write and

research. W. Caleb McDaniel helped build my knowledge of nineteenth-century history by offering me an individual reading. Edward Cox's class on Caribbean history played a key role in this dissertation. Without our discussions about slavery in the West Indies, this dissertation would not exist.

The teachers and professors who influenced me before coming to Rice should also be thanked. Kent Weier shared his love of history and helped to inspire me to become a historian. Peter Knupfer first introduced me to antebellum history as an undergraduate and converted someone interested in colonial America into an antebellum historian by handing me David Potter's *The Impending Crisis* for summer reading. John Rubadeau taught me how to write coherently. Victor Lieberman, Megan Raphoon, and Catherine Cangany all encouraged me to go to graduate school while I was studying at the University of Michigan. The archivists at the William Clements Library have helped me immensely throughout my time as a historian. Finally, there is no doubt in my mind that I would not have attended Rice without the guidance of J. Mills Thornton III, who first talked to me about studying the Wilmot Proviso a long time ago.

Numerous historians helped me create this dissertation. Eric H. Walther accepted a spot on my dissertation committee even though he did not have to and was with me during every step the process. His advice and his editing played a very important role in the crafting of my argument, and he no doubt made me a better historian. W. Caleb McDaniel helped me develop the scope of my dissertation, and working with him made me broaden my horizons as a scholar. Jason K. Phillips talked to me about the role of anticipation of the future in the study of history and gave me great context from which to

build my own work. Randall Hall, Bethany Johnson, and Pat Burgess provided a great academic atmosphere for my summer job at *The Journal of Southern History*, and the work they assigned me had a major impact on this dissertation. Rachel A. Shelden and Christopher Childers presented papers with me and their work influenced my own. Caroline Levander graciously accepted to be the outside reader on my dissertation committee despite her busy schedule, and for that I am very appreciative.

My primary academic debt is to John Boles, the supervisor of my committee. As my advisor he always knew what to say and when to say it. His enthusiasm for my work on the Wilmot Proviso and encouragement of my studying political history in general made me glad to be doing what I was doing. He helped bring me to Rice and made me happy for that decision every day. I look forward to seeking his advice and wisdom in the future.

The graduate community at Rice as a whole and my cohort in particular served as an important pillar in my academic career. Their friendship and support made difficult times not seem so bad and the good times feel great. Jim and Rebecca Wainwright, from going to the Mez to watching the Sopranos, made me feel like I had family down here. Drew Bledsoe let me know he was on my side and helped me whenever I needed it. Andy Lang always let me bounce ideas off of him and showed me that a Texan could like hockey. I could not have asked for a better role model in my studies as a graduate student than Luke Harlow. After Hurricane Ike tore a hole in my roof, Allison Madar I have valued our friendship since day one. Joe Locke and Ben Wright always gave me someone with whom to debate my ideas. Shani Roper always answered my simplest questions

about the Caribbean. Zach Dresser needs no description. Robin Sager and Wes Phelps were fantastic grad reps. Andrew Canady, Blake Ellis, Andrew Baker, John Marks, and Sam Abramson provided great camaraderie during my time at Rice.

I also want to thank my friends and family outside of Texas. Andrew Mackenzie, Robert Greer, Nick Doherty, Brent Habitz, Steve Richert, Adam Long, John deVries, Erin Beck, Aaron Gadowski, John Keeton, Justin Combs, Donny Murdock, and Greg Moser all helped to boost my decision get a PhD at one time or another. One word in this dissertation is dedicated to Brian Cook for his sanity during uncertain times. Dan Auerbach and Patrick Carney helped me focus when I needed it. Thomas Lifson and Robert Gonzalez demonstrated to me what I can do with a history degree and gave me leeway to do it while completing my academic commitments. Ron and Kris Sawyer helped sustain my studying during a pivotal point in my career at Rice. Every aunt, uncle, and cousin always showed me support, especially Ryan Sawyer. Bob, Deb, Karsten, Hannah, and Mary Bischoff welcomed me with open arms when I joined their family in 2011. They always gave me encouragement and it was never underappreciated.

The greatest debt I incurred during this entire process is to a brilliant writer and scholar in her own right, my wife Sarah Bischoff Paulus. She read and edited every single word in this dissertation while also pursuing her own academic career. She never let me quit on days when the task seemed insurmountable, and she made this dissertation, like everything else in my life, infinitely better. Any writing mistake in this dissertation is fully my responsibility.

Table of Contents

Introduction: The Role of Anticipation in the Actions of Slaveholders	1
Chapter One: The Haitian Revolution and Slaveholding Anxiety	14
Chapter Two: "Fanaticism" and Southern Fears of Insurrection	63
Chapter Three: Transnational Abolitionism and American Exceptionalism	110
Chapter Four: The Growing Proslavery Fear of the Abolitionist Power	159
Chapter Five: Texas Annexation and the Proslavery Promise	204
Chapter Six: Wilmot's Proviso and the Slaveholding Crisis	256
Chapter Seven: The Southern Turn Against American Exceptionalism	310
Bibliography	364

Introduction

The Role of Anticipation in the Actions of Slaveholders

For the generality of men are naturally apt to be swayed by fear rather than by reverence.

-Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

The perfect condition of slavery...is nothing else, but the state of war continued, between a lawful conqueror and a captive.

-John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government, Of Slavery*

Anticipation has guided human behavior throughout history. Future expectations often dictate present choices, and in a democratic society, citizens choose their leaders based on what they presume those leaders will do once in office. Protest movements choose their directions from projected results, and citizens' reactions to government policies are inseparable from their expectations about those policies' ramifications. This relationship is woven into the very fabric of the United States by the Constitution's preamble: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." Americans ratified their new Constitution in 1788 not simply to secure the new government for their own generation, but to ensure that the Union would serve as a future safeguard for freedom, prosperity, and safety for their descendants.

On December 20, 1860, South Carolinians voted to abandon that Union for the same reasons their state had joined it. Led by a proslavery movement that viewed Abraham Lincoln's place at the helm of the federal government as a real and present danger to the security of the South's system of slavery, southerners—both slaveholders and nonslaveholders—willingly risked civil war by seceding from the United States. Rather than staying within the fold of the Union and waiting to see how the new president would conduct himself in regards to slavery in the territories and in the South, these southerners took bold action to change their destiny. By acting on their anticipations, they wagered on the possibility of a different future, believing the time for separation had arrived. As this dissertation contends, the fear of slave insurrection, which was influenced by the Haitian Revolution, and the belief that northern antislavery forces would work to end slavery at all cost—including inciting slave violence—shaped planter concerns for the future over the arc of the antebellum period, affecting the very course of national politics. In addition to these fears, Abraham Lincoln's support for the Wilmot Proviso, which prohibited the expansion of slavery in the West, became seen as a sufficient and valid reason for disunion and the creation of the Confederacy.

From 1840 to 1850, six different men served as president of the United States. All six held a different worldview and acted as individuals, in many cases unencumbered by their party's own platforms. They all invariably put the nation on the path to Civil War by implementing policies that they individually hoped and believed would move the nation forward. American history has often been altered by the unexpected—for example, the deaths of two presidents in three presidential election cycles. This dissertation focuses on those in power in the South and their expectations of what would happen if political

leaders in the North became too influenced—or corrupted—by "fanatical" abolitionists. As the North became more antislavery, both in perception and reality, fears of the implications of this position helped create a broad consensus among ordinary white southerners that led them to risk their lives on the battlefield in the name of defending their homes and way of life.

Despite outward appearances, slaveholders in America understood the dangers of holding another human being in bondage. They believed an insurrection by the enslaved could occur at any moment and often contemplated the results. Planters especially worried that southern society would fall into, as they termed it, "servile insurrection." The white fear of blacks played an important role in the history of the South. From the use of former slaves by Britain in the American War of Independence to white flight that plagued cities across the United States in the twentieth century, white paranoia about black Americans has been a common thread woven into the fabric of American history. This paranoia likewise played a pivotal role in the politics of slavery from 1800 to 1860. Throughout the antebellum period southerners continually pointed to the Haitian Revolution as an example of what was likely to occur in the United States if white Americans living in free states ever turned against slavery. As the French colony of San Domingue erupted with revolution and racial warfare, which American planters blamed on ruthless "fanatics" who wanted to end slavery at all costs, southerners developed a proslavery interpretation of the Constitution that stated slavery must be protected under all conditions. Nationally, the proslavery movement controlled discussions of the antislavery movement.

Deeming everyone who opposed slavery a "fanatic," proslavery spokesmen pointed to antislavery advocates as promoters of slave insurrection and the violent destruction of the South.

For the most part, white southerners believed their own rhetoric. The Haitian Revolution in 1791 showed—despite the constant harping of American planters about the docility of their own slaves—that a black population, yearning to be free, had the capability of violently revolting en masse against their bondage. Slavery became the American Janus, and every major slave insurrection scare in the South became connected to Haiti, regardless of how long ago it had happened—even while slaveholders told the world that their system of slavery had little in common with the slavery of San Domingue. Proslavery writers often stated that the result of emancipation in the South would be disastrous, not just to the economic well being of the planter class, but also to the physical safety of all whites living in the South. Slaveholders believed the end of slavery would spark racial violence. In a demented form of empathy, they expected that freed blacks would seek revenge in the same way they would if the roles had been reversed. While slaveholders told themselves that those they personally held in bondage would never rise up, planters also had a near constant fear of an American Toussaint leading a rebellion against the master class. In such an extreme crisis, southerners in the first decades of the nineteenth century believed that the federal

government, *if controlled by the proslavery movement*, could act as a safety net by sending the military to protect the white population.¹

In reaction to the Haitian Revolution, southern politicians demanded that the federal government protect slavery by not creating any policy that they believed would lend credence to successful slave uprisings in the Caribbean, and thus inspiring them in the United States. For example, fearing that officially recognizing the only nation to be created from a slave rebellion would undermine southern slavery, leaders of the proslavery movement, in the name of national security, blocked the official recognition of Haiti for nearly seventy years, from the 1790s to 1860. During the days of the early republic, most slaveholders believed that as long as the federal government did not interfere with slavery, or slavery's natural expansion, the South's peculiar institution would remain safely intact. A laissez-faire attitude domestically combined with a proslavery foreign policy was all they needed.

This connection between slavery and the federal government, however, began to change with emancipation in the West Indies by England. Historians Edward Rugemer and Matthew Guterl have shown that southern slaveholders were well aware of their Caribbean counterparts and often related and contrasted the experiences in southern slaveholding to that of the West Indies. The end of slavery in the West Indies by Great Britain showed American slaveholders that slavery

¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977): 112-131.

could be eliminated by majoritarian votes in a national assembly in the same way that the Haitian Revolution proved the possibility of a successful slave insurrection in what was once considered one of the most stable slave societies in the world.²

The initial, natural reaction to emancipation in the West Indies by slaveholders was to compare the national government of the United States to its British counterpart. While some radicals in the proslavery movement prophesied otherwise, American slaveholders in the 1830s—as did most of their fellow citizens—believed that the unique system of government created by the Constitution protected slavery in a way that the British Parliament did not. The Union, argued southerners who supported the Constitution, had been created to "insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence." Unlike the British central government, the American federal government had the duty to protect slavery from foes that wanted to violently overthrow it. During the American discussion of British emancipation, southern Unionists—like most Americans—argued that the Constitution was exceptional. American federalism was unique, especially in comparison to British parliamentarianism and colonialism. Most southerners in the 1830s believed that abolitionists in the United States could never gain enough control to affect slavery in the South. They anticipated that the “fanatics” of the antislavery movement would never trump the risk of slave insurrection and would never gain mainstream acceptance in the North.

² Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Not all southerners agreed, however. Some, most notably South Carolina proslavery radical Robert Turnbull in 1833, predicted a future where an antislavery northern majority would slowly gain power. The South, he warned, traveled on the same road that Jamaica and other British Caribbean colonies did. An Abolitionist Power had been at work for years, Turnbull told his readers. He maintained that a massive trans-Atlantic conspiracy against slavery was being formed. The antislavery movement hoped to turn the South into the Caribbean. Under the power of this new majority, the Constitution would not protect slaveholders. During the three decades before the Civil War, a large portion of southern society came to adopt Turnbull's worldview, including some of the most powerful leaders in the South.

Following Turnbull's lead in the 1830s, many proslavery radicals critiqued the notion of American exceptionalism by challenging the idea that the Constitution was any different from the English Parliament. Ardent supporters of slavery began to claim that the federal government had the duty to actively protect domestic slavery. Under the guise of national security and pointing to the shadow of the Haitian Revolution that loomed over the South, they supported legislation that censored the free speech of abolitionists, advocated strengthening the military in order to protect against slave insurrections, and promoted the expansion of slaveholding territory in the West—all of which fell under the prerogative of the national government. Due to the crucial support of compliant northern politicians who did not oppose slavery, southerners succeeded in creating a stronger federal government that could protect American slavery and attack the Abolitionist Power they came to fear. White southerners, over time, cemented this connection

between American exceptionalism and the government's active protection of slavery.

The proslavery movement soon realized, however, that a small group of congressmen could reshape American politics almost instantly and that their northern allies, who for decades had supported the measures to protect slavery, could be lost very quickly. In August 1846 during a debate over funding for the Mexican War, Pennsylvania Congressman David Wilmot sparked a debate in Congress, as well as across the nation, that challenged the proslavery movement's control of the federal government. Influenced by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the congressman proposed that slavery be prohibited in all territory added to the United States from the war. When northerners in the House of Representatives passed what became known as the Wilmot Proviso (though it failed in the Senate), proslavery southerners began to believe that Turnbull's prediction had been right. Southern politicians united in opposition. As Congress debated restricting slavery in the West, sectional fissures trumped party division in the United States Congress. Southerners, regardless of party or region, strongly condemned the proviso as an attack not only on the future extension of slavery on the continent but on the South itself and the *continuation of slavery where it already existed*. The Wilmot Proviso became a watershed in American history. Even though it never became law, the persistence of the North to try to pass such a measure slowly eroded the southern belief that slavery could be secured from insurrections like those experienced in the Caribbean by staying in the Union.

The Wilmot Proviso created the opportunity for ardent proslavery forces to

gain a foothold in the mindset of the South. Turnbull's disciples pointed to it as evidence for their prediction of the future. Tapping into the fear that antislavery forces in the North aimed for the violent destruction of their society, slaveholding leaders of the South, most vocally John C. Calhoun, organized an opposition to the proviso that called for the legalization of slavery throughout all of the United States territories, not just below the line of latitude struck during the sectional bargaining of the Missouri Compromise in 1820. The extremist claim that abolitionists longed for the bloodshed of all white southerners offered radical proslavery proponents a way to rally white non-slaveholders and slaveholders alike in opposition to the Abolitionist Power. They used the fear of insurrection to galvanize the South in a way that had not happened before.

Why the Wilmot Proviso caused such a stir in the South has received little attention in the historiography of American politics. Though this piece of legislation is widely understood as consequential, historians have not studied its history comprehensively. This scant historical investigation may originate from historians trying to offer quick and uncomplicated answers as they work to get to their major discussion—the election of 1848, the Compromise of 1850, and other events that led to the secession crisis during the decade before the Civil War. The Wilmot Proviso is often treated as just a speed bump as scholars make their way towards the tumultuous politics of the 1850s: a minor event surrounded by the major ones instead of a pivotal moment that ignited the conflagration of outspoken sectional division. Nearly every history of antebellum politics and the sectional conflict either

ends in 1846 or begins at 1848 or later, bypassing the crucial two years in which Wilmot greatly affected American politics. The southern reaction to the Haitian Revolution, British abolitionism, or the colonization of free blacks directly influenced how slaveholders responded to restrictions of slavery in the West and eventually to their interpretation of the ultimate meaning of Abraham Lincoln's election.

The most substantial account of the proviso was written in 1967. *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy* by Chaplain W. Morrison focused on *northern* Democrats and the rift between the Van Burenites and the followers of President Polk. Most monographs discuss Wilmot as signaling the strength of the antislavery movement in the North without a thorough appraisal of why the South united around its opposition to restricting slavery in a place many thought it would not be profitable. Furthermore, historical accounts do not thoroughly consider why a southern unity that failed to emerge in opposition to Andrew Jackson during the Nullification Crisis came into being in the 1840s as slaveholders rallied against the prohibition of slavery in the western territories.³

Most historians discussing the southern response to the Wilmot Proviso contend that it stemmed chiefly from the feeling that they were losing equal rights within the Union—that white southerners fought for abstract ideas of liberty and equality—instead of fear that Wilmot could cause a Haitian-like slave uprising.

³ Chaplain W. Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

Other scholars state that the Wilmot Proviso simply insulted the honor of slaveholders because southerners felt politicians in the North were morally condemning them. While it is clear that some southern politicians feared losing equality in the abstract sense, believed Wilmot insulted their honor, or even threatened the South's economic standing, those answers offer only a perfunctory understanding of the situation. Historians have not taken seriously the stated claims over the fear of slave insurrection and the southern belief that the security of the white population of the slave states absolutely depended on the ability to send excess slaves to new territory. Despite nearly fifty years of events that showed a common thread building from the Haitian Revolution to the 1840s, historians have slighted this southern preoccupation.⁴

Among the more examinations of the southern reaction to the Wilmot Proviso, William W. Freehling's *The Road to Disunion* briefly offers a study of the thought behind the southern reaction to Wilmot's proposed restriction of slavery. He focuses on the Wilmot Proviso by exploring the actions taken by some politicians in Kentucky. He writes that many southerners in the Upper South, most notably

⁴ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Sectional Crisis and Southern Constitutionalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), Michael F. Holt, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), Elizabeth Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

abolitionist Cassius Clay, tried to implement plans that would rid their states of the enslaved. Calling it the “slave drain,” Freehling contends that many slaveholders from the border South hoped to send their slaves to land in the West and Deep South as a way of “whitening” their population. He thinks slaveholders in the Black Belt of Mississippi and Alabama argued against Wilmot’s prohibition of the extension of slavery because they feared that one day South Carolinians, Georgians, Mississippians, Louisianans and other slave-owners would try to rid themselves of their peculiar institution by sending their excess slaves out to the West.⁵

This interpretation aptly points to the fear underlying southerners’ reactions to the Proviso yet almost completely ignores the key role that the Haitian Revolution played in their denunciations of Wilmot’s plan. The proslavery movement believed in the power of demographics. Southerners thought that a stable system of slavery could only support a certain population density of the enslaved. The island nature of slavery on the Caribbean colony had prevented French planters from easily removing excess slaves from their population. As the numbers of those in slavery grew, southern intellectuals insisted, the security of San Domingue lessened until finally the small master class could no longer control the large black population. American slaveholders believed the same thing would happen in the United States if the slave states became surrounded by free soil. Without the possibility of expanding slavery, the South, in effect, was like an island, enclosed by a barrier that

⁵ William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists as Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Freehling does rightly argue that both proslavery and antislavery forces believed that Wilmot would eventually end slavery, however, there is little analysis about how southerners thought that slavery’s end would result in massive violence and bloodshed.

created an ever more dense slave population. With Haiti on their minds, slaveholders feared the physical destruction of their society. They therefore expressed exasperation over "fanatical" abolitionists gaining control of the mechanisms of the national government that powerful southerners had helped to strengthen and in anticipation that it could defend the interests of the white South.

In 1847 many slaveholders warned that the passage of the Wilmot Proviso would directly lead to disunion. Despite offering assurances that slavery would remain legal in areas where it already existed, the election of the first pro-Wilmot Proviso president—Abraham Lincoln—caused the South to anticipate a future that left their society in ruin. For many living in the South, the threat of passing Wilmot's restriction could only be responded to with disunion and the risk of war. White southerners anticipated an increase in slave insurrections at the precise moment that antislavery leaders—who they believed would not assist slaveholders in putting down an uprising of the enslaved—gained control of the federal government and the military. These expectations, which had developed over the span of sixty years, gave birth to the Confederacy.

Chapter One

The Haitian Revolution and Slaveholding Anxiety

To adopt any policy by which slavery would be hemmed in, within its present limits, does appear to me, when we look at the growing disparity of numbers between the races, the perpetual stimulus to dissatisfaction which will be held out to the negro, and his enlarging capacity and increasing facilities for mischief, to be providing for a renewal upon our own soil of the scenes of St. Domingo, and the destruction of the race or the relation, amid national and social convulsion.

-John Holcombe's Secessionist Speech, Virginia, March 20, 1861¹

The color of turquoise surrounded him as he watched a speck far across the blue Caribbean waters turn slowly into a coast. Louis Moreau Gottschalk's piano had played for happy audiences across Cuba—from Matanzas to Santiago—where slaveholders showered him with flowers along with their applause. Now, on June 6, 1857, he stood alone on the top deck of a ship heading for St. Kitts. As night fell, the mountains, "whose angular peaks seemed as if they wished to pierce the clouds," arose before him. The palm trees, alone on the deserted shoreline, appeared to him sad in their isolation as the horizon blurred from an approaching storm. As Haiti's coast came into view Gottschalk thought of his grandmother. Two words came to his mind as he sailed past the island: "Santo Domingo."²

Nearly four decades after French planters saw a slave insurrection turn the

¹ William W. Freehling and Craig M. Simpson, eds., *Showdown in Virginia: The 1861 Convention and the Fate of the Union*, eds. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010): 65.

² Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of A Pianist: The Chronicles of a New Orleans Music Legend* ed. Jeanne Behrend (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006): 10.

plantations of the "Pearl of the Antilles" into rubble, Gottschalk was born in New Orleans to a family who, like many others of their station, had fled the fires of the Haitian Revolution and sailed to America. The first virtuoso pianist of the United States, Louis Moreau Gottschalk decided to keep a diary of his travels as he performed concerts throughout the West Indies in 1857. While in Cuba, Spanish plantation owners assured him that the blacks enslaved on the island felt happy to live on their plantations. Fellow travelers—no doubt less accustomed to slavery—told him with some astonishment, "they had not heard a single blow of the whip."³

Gottschalk responded quite differently. In his "notes" the American diarist mocked the naïve travelers. A man from Louisiana knew what nonslaveholders did not. He wrote, "Happy tourists! Suppose that, instead of looking upon those joyous faces that smile in the presence of their master, you had the curiosity to take off their clothes [and] examine their shoulders. You would have learned more...by the sight of certain scars badly healed, than all your observations, founded upon your suppositions, had taught you."⁴ Haiti served as a permanent reminder to many southerners that the enslaved often yearned to be free. Discontented in their bondage, slaves at any moment could strike out against the society that held them in chains.

Though hardly a proslavery advocate—he sided with the Union during the Civil War and believed the violence seen during Haitian Revolution by the enslaved to be legitimate—Gottschalk's sail past the only black-controlled country of the Western Hemisphere made him recall stories from his childhood, passed along by his

³ Ibid, 9.

⁴ Ibid. See Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 2004) for a detailed account of the Haitian Revolution.

grandmother. He never tired of the tales about his great-grandfather fighting insurgents at Gros Morne or his grandmother "half naked and dying of hunger" who saved herself by "wandering many days in the woods" before being found by the captain of an English ship and escaping to Jamaica. Thousands of refugees who fled Saint-Domingue, he insisted, could tell similar narratives. They had seen the violence. "It is," he explained, the "history of all the colonists of Santo Domingo toward the close of last century." The tale of the Haitian Revolution was passed from generation to generation not just by blacks and abolitionists who remembered and celebrated the victory of the enslaved over the white slaveholders, but also by white planters who fled the destruction to start anew in the United States.⁵

American slaveholders always held a strong connection with the planters of the West Indies. Southern plantation owners often read news accounts from the Caribbean and identified with the planter class in both the French and British colonies. The Haitian Revolution remained in the memories of many southerners throughout the antebellum period because American slaveholders recognized these foreign planters as their brethren. Slaveholding transcended differences in nationality or language. As the South's own black population grew and its slave society expanded, the events of that small French colony in the Caribbean frightened American slaveholders and reminded them to be vigilant in the defense of their region's peculiar institution.⁶

Saint Domingue—or as Americans often referred to it, Santo Domingo—had been

⁵ Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 10-12.

⁶ Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008): 33-41; Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008): 1-78.

ripe for a revolution. The white slaveholders of France's largest colony saw an explosion of the black population on its side of the Island of Hispaniola. Dubbed the "Pearl of the Antilles" because of its productivity in supplying sugar to the rest of the world, the island welcomed a steady import of new slaves as planters sought larger profits from their Caribbean estates. In the years prior to the Haitian Revolution, the numbers of blacks enslaved on the massive plantations reached over ten times that of the white population tasked with maintaining the tranquility of the enslaved population. This contrasted sharply with the United States, where only South Carolina and Virginia's enslaved populations came close to being the majority of the total population at the turn of the century.⁷

Regardless of the differences between slavery in the United States and Saint Domingue, news of a large slave insurrection and reports of savage deaths of white planters in the West Indies caused dread in white America. Though some mainstream antislavery advocates pointed to the violent rebellion as an example of the evils or dangers of slavery and others claimed the bloodletting of whites by blacks as justifiable in the face of enslavement, most shied away from endorsing the ferocious method of self-emancipation deployed by the enslaved Haitians. The extreme violence especially dismayed many Quakers who served as the vanguard of the antislavery movement in the United States. Some American opponents of slavery worried that the brutality of racial warfare in the West Indies would turn people away from their movement in the United

⁷ Tim Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations during the Early Republic* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003): 3-4; Robert K. Lacerte, "The Evolution of Land and Labor in the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1820," *The Americas* 34 (April 1978): 449; Susan B. Carter, "Black population, by state and slave/free status: 1790-1860" *Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

States. Others worried that their sympathetic stance towards the *Amis des Noirs*, the French abolitionist society the planter class blamed for sparking the rebellion, would lead other Americans to disengage with the antislavery movement in the United States. This idea would only grow more popular with the publishing of *Historical Survey of the Colony of St. Domingo* by Bryan Edwards, which explicitly blamed the antislavery movement for the Haitian Revolution and would gain popularity in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century.⁸

Despite employing similar language to that used by Americans in their revolution against England, the enslaved blacks of the Caribbean participating in their own uprising received little support from the fledgling republic of the New World. In Philadelphia—the capital of the young United States—President George Washington, stunned with the news, referred to the slave rebellion as "Lamentable!" and wondered, "Where it will stop, is difficult to say." Furthermore, as the rebellion became more violent and the French Directory issued a proclamation of emancipation in Saint Domingue, Jeffersonian Republicans distanced themselves from both the radical ideology of the French Revolution they once embraced and the universal language they formerly espoused in the 1770s. One northern Republican fumed that the "leveling principles" of the French would ruin "the finest colony on earth." A South Carolinian wrote that allowing French

⁸ Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation*, 43-44; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968): 378-380; Theodore Dwight, *An Oration, Spoken Before "The Connecticut Society, for the Promotion of Freedom and the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Held in Bondage."* (Hartford, 1794): 10-12; M. Garran Coulon, *An inquiry into the causes of the insurrection of the negroes in the island of St. Domingo* (London: J. Johnson, 1792) Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 391-450. For an example of the enslaved claiming a part of the French Revolution see also Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

ideas to penetrate the South would be "fatal." While having differences over domestic policy, the leadership of both the Federalists and the Republicans shared a similar reaction of the black revolution in the French West Indies. Black unrest in Saint Domingue needed to be at least quarantined, if not entirely prevented, for the sake of national security.⁹

Despite initial trade between northern merchants and the black military forces in the colony, the official stance of the United States towards the revolution concentrated on undermining the revolt and restoring white control of Saint Domingue. Sympathetic to French slaveholders, President Washington supported their attempts to regain control of their West Indian enslaved labor that fought to be free. His administration advanced the French \$726,000—drawn against the United States' debt from the American Revolution—in the form of weapons and ammunition taken from the arsenal at West Point while American merchants supplied food for the white forces. This aid from the United States ended once the planter class of the island became overrun and the black insurgents gained control over much of the island of Hispaniola.¹⁰

⁹ George Washington to Jean Baptiste Ternant, September 24, 1791 in *The Writings of George Washington*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931-1944): 31: 375; Simon P. Newman, "American Political Culture and the French and Haitian Revolutions: Nathaniel Cutting and the Jeffersonian Republicans," in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* ed. David P. Geggus (University of South Carolina Press, 2001): 72-85, quote on 79; Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1988), 111. Political divisions, instead of sectional divisions, in American foreign policy in regards to trading with the Toussaint Louverture's de facto government of Saint Domingue would appear with the presidency of John Adams. See Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy*, 66-71 and Gordon S. Brown, *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005): 139-143.

¹⁰ Donald R. Hickey, "America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti, 1791-1806," *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (Winter 1982): 364-365; George Washington to John Vaughan, December 27, 1791 in *The Writings of George Washington*, 31: 453; Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy*, 24-26.

American slave states also received direct pleas for reinforcements from West Indian slaveholders. French planters asked Governor Charles Pinckney of South Carolina to send some of the state's militia to help quell the rebellion, warning that the destruction of French slavery threatened all of their slaveholding neighbors. Pinckney declined. He did, however, agree that the Caribbean insurrection imperiled his state and forwarded the Saint Domingue request for help to President Washington. Along with the French letter Pinckney noted his fear that if the slave revolt went unchecked the "flame which will extend to all neighboring islands, may prove not a very pleasing or agreeable example to the Southern states." The risk of doing nothing, he urged the president, could be disastrous to American slavery.¹¹

White southerners thus took every precaution against the possibility of the Haitian Revolution coming to America. South Carolina's legislature, at Governor Pinckney's request, strengthened the state's militia. The governor believed the militia needed to be able to "act with promptness and effect" in the case of a slave rebellion at home. Though the government of South Carolina did not martial troops to support their French counterparts, it did help the Caribbean slave owners by sending money to support the crumbling master class of the French West Indies. Whites would fight the insurrection for two years until finally their power collapsed. The black population took control of the colony in 1793. With the fall of white power in Saint Domingue, many in control of American foreign policy believed slavery could never be established again. The United States found itself neighbors with what would eventually be the only black-led nation in

¹¹ George C. Rogers, *Evolution of a Federalist: William Loughton Smith of Charleston, 1758-1812* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1962): 246-250, Pinckney quote found on 249.

the Western Hemisphere to be formed from an insurrection of the enslaved. The vulnerability of slavery had been exposed.¹²

Besides securing military and political responses from fellow slaveholders overseas, the Haitian Revolution also caused many southern slaveholders to lash out against French abolitionists, who they believed presented a very dangerous threat to the South. Planters proclaimed antislavery advocates "Madmen, Robbers of their Neighbor's Property, and enemies to the Peace of Society" and worked to sequester their own slave population from people and information considered dangerous to their slave society. In Virginia proslavery forces attacked an antislavery meeting, claiming that abolitionists wanted to stir the slave population to commit acts of rebellion. Shaking the American slave states to their core, the Haitian Revolution produced a set of severe southern responses because it served as a real-life example of a slave system gone wrong. Proslavery forces connected white discontent with slavery in the South with the violence and instability seen in the Caribbean. Any talk of abolitionism came to be viewed as too dangerous and unacceptable by many slaveholders.¹³

If they expressed a high degree of anxiety in the early days of the Haitian

¹² Governor Charles Pinckney to the South Carolina House and Senate, December 4, 1791, Governors' Messages 1783-1870, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, hereafter SCDAH, <http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/onlinearchives/Thumbnails.aspx?recordId=284337>; Marty D. Matthews, *Forgotten Founder: The Life and Times of Charles Pinckney* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004): 77-78; Timothy Mathewson, "George Washington's Policy Toward the Haitian Revolution," *Diplomatic History* 3 (Summer, 1979): 324-325.

¹³ Charles Nisbet to Reverend William Rogers, Carlisle, Aug. 17, 1792, Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Historical Society of Pennsylvania quoted in Tim Matthewson, Abraham Bishop, "The Rights of Black Men," and the American Reaction to the Haitian Revolution," *The Journal of Negro History*, 67 (Summer, 1982): 149; Berlin, *Masters Without Slaves: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South*. (New York: The New Press, 1974): 82-83.

rebellion, the fears of white southerners became even greater with the news that the French had lost control over the colony of Saint Domingue altogether. The *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* reported that stories from the Caribbean filled Americans "with horror" as descriptions of "burning estates, and putting all prisoners to death, fill up the measure of every day's calamity." In a letter, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson shared his concerns about the Haitian Revolution with James Monroe. He envisioned a day when Americans would suffer the same fate as Saint Domingue planters. Jefferson wrote, "I become daily more and more convinced that all the West India islands will remain in the hands of the people of color, and a total expulsion of the whites sooner or later take place. It is high time we should foresee the bloody scenes which our children certainly, and possibly ourselves (south of the Patowmac [sic]) have to wade through, and try avert them."¹⁴

As the situation in Saint Domingue became more violent and the French lost control of the colony, refugees—like Louis Moreau Gottschalk's family—poured into cities across the United States. In many instances, American slaveholders eagerly helped their counterparts from the West Indies. Secretary of State Jefferson wrote, "The situation of the St. Domingo fugitives (aristocrats as they are) calls aloud for pity and charity. Never was so deep a tragedy presented to the feelings of man I deny the power of the general government to apply money to such a purpose but I deny it with a bleeding heart. It belongs to the state governments. Pray urge ours to be liberal." Other federal officials also received pleas for help or requests for letters of introduction from French

¹⁴ July 20, 1793 *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*; Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 14 July, 1793, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* ed. John Catanzarti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995): 26: 501-503; Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy*, 59-60.

planters arriving in American ports. Most American leaders responded positively to the requests for help.¹⁵

French refugees from Saint Domingue petitioned President Washington, in both French and English, for assistance. The president, obliged to write back to some of the requests, offered his sympathies along with some advice. Washington responded to one pair of refugees by sending them twenty dollars. In his letter he explained that though he could not give more individual aid, he believed that in "almost every city and large town in the United States" committees had been created to further help them. He also asked the Secretary of the Treasury to send two thousand dollars to the "Committee at Baltimore, appointed to superintend" the French planters that had arrived in that city.¹⁶

Throughout the 1790s, roughly 90 percent of the white population in Saint Domingue fled the French colony and nearly one-quarter of them came to North America in search of a safe haven. Cities across the entire eastern seaboard received an influx of French-speaking refugees. Many immigrants retained their cultural identity as Frenchmen while both adapting to their new residences and culturally impacting their new communities. In New York and Philadelphia, white refugees added to the culture of those cities by teaching piano and dance. Others, having lost much of their wealth, served as

¹⁵ Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 14 July, 1793, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 26: 501-503. See also Joret de Longchamps to Thomas Jefferson, September 23, 1793, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 27: 146; Edward Rutledge to Thomas Jefferson, November 9, 1793, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 27: 336.

¹⁶ Adhemar de Brethoux to George Washington December, 1793, in *The Papers of George Washington vol 14*. ed. Theodore J. Crackel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008): 654; George Washington to Madames Laurent de Saxji and Laurent de Verneuil, December 26, 1793 in *The Writings of George Washington* 33: 217-218; George Washington to Alexander Hamilton March 21, 1794 *The Writings of Washington* 33: 299.

housekeepers in order to maintain a living. French doctors also participated in the debate over yellow fever during the period of an outbreak, which northerners had blamed the refugees for causing. Jean Devèze, a former military surgeon who became the chief physician at one of Philadelphia's major hospitals, emerged as a hero during the yellow fever epidemic when he introduced tropical remedies to fight the disease and recognized that yellow fever could not be passed on communicably.¹⁷

More than just white Frenchmen came to the United States. Slaves and the *gens de couleur*, the French name given to free blacks, also came to northern cities such as Philadelphia, where their arrival added to a black population that expanded dramatically from 1790 to 1800. Despite being more impoverished and receiving little help from the private and public organizations formed to aid the West Indian refugees, black immigrants found a receptive African American community. While American free blacks welcomed former slaves who had gained their freedom upon arrival in Pennsylvania into their communities, whites worried that they had brought the insurrectionary spirit with them.¹⁸

In some cases, white northerners became shocked as black women from Saint Domingue continued to be employed as the paid companions of white men—a customary practice in the former French colony. One Philadelphian wrote that the city during this period "gave the appearance of a great hotel" as it "thronged with French people of all shades from the colonies." He described "mestizo ladies, with the palest complexions, jet

¹⁷ John E. Baur, "International Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution," *The Americas* vol. 26 (April 1970): 395-398; *The Letters of Benjamin Rush* vol 2 ed. L. H. Butterfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951): 738.

¹⁸ Susan Branson and Leslie Patrick, "Étrangers dans un Pays Étrange: Saint-Dominguan Refugees of Color in Philadelphia," in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, 193-208.

black hair, and eyes of the gazelle" along with "black negresses, in flowing white dresses, and turbans" walking "with white or creole...forming a contrast to the native Americans" and older European immigrants.¹⁹

In the South, Norfolk and Baltimore became major landing spots for those arriving from Saint Domingue in the 1790s. Both places offered relief, but most refugees perceived Baltimore as the city of greater opportunity due to its size, resources, and larger market for employment. As new immigrants plied their wares in Maryland's largest city, the economy grew. Just as in the North, many Saint-Dominguan immigrants—the majority white or of mixed race—contributed to their new home's culture by becoming teachers, lawyers, and business owners, or by using their expertise in such subjects as irrigation to support themselves during the region's dry seasons. In Louisiana, another destination favored by some refugees because of its French influence, former Saint-Dominguans contributed to the theatre and opera of New Orleans, becoming an important contributor the culture of the Crescent City.²⁰

West Indian immigrants who fled the Haitian Revolution helped improve indigo production in South Carolina by introducing new chemical agents while others developed vineyards in order to produce some of the earliest winemaking in the slave states.

Charleston too experienced a growth in theatre and opera performance with the increase

¹⁹ John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, in the Old Time; Being a Collection of Memoirs, Anecdotes, and Incidents of the City and Its Inhabitants and of the Earliest Settlements of the Inland Part of Pennsylvania, From the Days of the Founders* (Philadelphia: John Penington and Uriah Hunt: 1844): 181; Susan Brandon and Leslie Patrick, "Étrangers dans un Pays Étrange: Saint-Domingan Refugees of Color in Philadelphia," in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, 193-205.

²⁰ Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America*, 66-71; Baur, "International Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution," 398-400; A Creole of St. Domingue, *My Odyssey: Experiences of a Young Refugee From Two Revolutions* translated by Alethea de Peuch Parham (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959): 98-100.

of the Francophone influence in the city. Immigrants from the former French colony assimilated very quickly in the Palmetto State's population. South Carolina notices of marriages designated some brides as "formerly of Saint Domingo." While contributing culturally to the South, many refugees kept their French identity even as they married into the planter class of the United States. Like the Gottschalk family, many immigrants who came to the South retained the memory of the Haitian Revolution as they started their new lives in the slaveholding states of America.²¹

With the influx of new French refugees in their towns, slaveholders in the United States found themselves in a precarious position. Though sympathy for the French planters ran high among American planters, attempts at assisting white refugees often came into conflict with the reason why southerners had wanted to help the French planters in the first place—to protect slavery. Therefore, one of the slave states' first responses to the French colony's overthrow was to restrict the importation of Caribbean slaves and freedmen to the South. They thus hoped to reduce the possible influence of the Haitian Revolution over their own slave population by implementing harsher slave codes. Georgia, for example, required all "free negroes, mulattoes, or mustizoes" who came to the state register themselves, and their locations, at the local county clerk's office. The law further absolved the state from any recompense of "the value of slaves legally executed" to the slave owner. Later, Congress bolstered state restrictions on importations of the enslaved from the West Indies. The prospect of importing a black revolution made

²¹ Baur, "International Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution," 398-400; *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* ed. Mabel Louise Webber XXIII (1922): 27, 152-153; Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America*, 63, 71; William Winter, *Life and Art of Joseph Jefferson: Together With Some Account of His Ancestry and the Jefferson Family of Actors* (New York: Macmillan and Co, 1894): 153-155.

slaveholders wary of any new people—free or enslaved—who joined the black population of their rattled slave society. Apprehensiveness from large plantation owners about the possibility of insurrectionary ideas coming to the United States via Caribbean slave ships superseded the desire of minor slaveholders for access to cheaper enslaved labor.²²

Fearful of the possibility that the revolutionary spirit still stirred amid French colonialists or slaves now living amidst them, slaveholders in Virginia supported the strengthening of their militia and called on them to serve as a standing army, an assurance against any possible uprising. The concern Virginians had about insurrections trumped the traditional American skepticism about a permanent, active military force being established. Though slave resistance had been a threat long before the Haitian Revolution, including during the American Revolution nearly two decades prior, many slaveholders reported that the arrival of French refugees brought an increase in reported disturbances amongst the slave populace. In 1793 the people of the South warily watched for anything out of the ordinary.²³

²² John D. Cushing, ed., *The First Laws of the State of Georgia Part 2* (Wilmington, De: Michael Glazier, Inc, 1981): 530; Bill no. 1544, *The State Records of South Carolina: Journals of the House of Representatives, 1792-1794* ed. Michael E. Stevens (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988): 614; W. E. B. Dubois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade To The United States of America, 1638-1870* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1904): 70-74; Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University, 2009): 82-86; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: The New Press, 1974): 35-36; Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America*, 108-109; Jeffrey J. Crow, "Slave Rebelliousness and Social Conflict in North Carolina, 1775 to 1802," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37 (Jan., 1980): 94; *Annals of Congress* 7 Cong, 2 sess. p. 1564-1565.

²³ James Sidbury, "Saint Domingue in Virginia Ideology, Local Meanings, and Resistance to Slavery 1790-1800," *The Journal of Southern History* 63 (August 1997): 539 -540; Merton Dillon, *Slavery Attacked: Southern Slaves and Their Allies 1619-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990): 52; Jeffrey J. Crow, "Slave Rebelliousness and Social Conflict in North Carolina, 1775 to 1802," 72-93. Though not the an issue of general emancipation that American planters feared at the time, many

The specter of Haiti's successful revolution appeared in everyday life to some American slaveholders. John Randolph awoke to find his wife complaining of noise coming from the street outside their house in Richmond. After groggily going to the window, he found a group of black men gathered outside and "ordered them to disperse." At first, Randolph noted, "they seemed regardless of my words" but soon after left. After he returned to bed Randolph again heard two black men talking outside his window. Curious to know what had caused the commotion outside, he crept quietly to the window and heard one say to the other, "the blacks were to kill the white people soon in this place." After asking what time the rebellion would take place, the black companion (and Randolph) heard the answer—October 15th, just a few months away.²⁴

Randolph continued to listen anxiously. Incredulous about the potential insurrectionist's claim, the other asked, as a third joined the pair, why the rebels would wait so long. In reply to this skepticism the first slave made a bet, "pointing his finger down the street" while he explained that after the insurrection two different houses currently owned by Randolph's neighbors would be his. The "chief speaker" ended their conversation by reminding his compatriots to remember "how the blacks has [sic] killed the whites in the French Island and took it a little while ago." Randolph took seriously enough the conversation outside his window to share what he had heard with local

slaveholders alive during the Haitian Revolution scare had experienced grave concerns about large-scale slave unrest when during the American Revolution just eighteen years before the colonial governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, offered freedom to all male slaves that left patriot plantations and remained loyal to the British Empire. See Woody Holton, " 'Rebel against Rebel': Enslaved Virginians and the Coming of the American Revolution," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 105 (Spring, 1997): 157-192.

²⁴ The entire story comes from the following: Disposition of John Randolph, July 21, 1793 in Sherwin McRae, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts from August 11, 1792 to December 31, 1793 vol. VI* (Richmond, 1886): 452-453.

authorities in a deposition documented by the Virginia state government. In the months following Randolph's deposition, numerous accounts of other instances of slave resistance, from New York to Georgia, engendered anxiety throughout the slaveholding states. The slaveholding South especially stood on guard. During this time a warning from Lieutenant Governor of Virginia James Wood reached the South Carolina governor's office. A letter had been found discussing a possible insurrection to be launched around the same date—October 15th—mentioned by the black men outside of Randolph's window. A grand conspiracy, white southern leaders feared, seemed to be afoot.²⁵

Written under the pseudonym of the "Secret Keeper, Richmond," the letter read, "The great Secret that has been so long in the being with our Colour has come nearly to a hed [sic] though some in our Town has told of it, but in which the Manner it is not believed." Addressed to the "Secret Keeper, Norfolk" and allegedly carried by a black preacher named Gawin who "passed through Richmond on his way to Norfolk," the letter stated that insurrectionists had obtained "about five hundred Guns and plenty of Led, but not much Powder." The most frightening aspect for the South Carolina governor came next, however: "Since I wrote you last I got a letter from our friend in Charleston, he tells me he has listed near six thousand men and there is a gentleman that says he will give us

²⁵ Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts: Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel, and others* (New York: International Publishers, 1943): 213-215; Thomas Newton to James Wood, August 8th 1793, SCDAH, <http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/onlinearchives/Thumbnails.aspx?recordId=284391>. For an overview of this rumor see and the connections between it, political machinations of South Carolina Federalists, and former French Saint-Domingue planters who wished to foment slave insurrection in the name of spreading the French Revolution, see Robert Alderson, "Charleston's Rumored Revolt of 1793," in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, 93-106. Alderson discusses whether the "Secret Keeper" plot was real along with who may have benefitted from the panic and fear caused by the rumor of an impending slave insurrection stemming from the Haitian Revolution.

as much power as want and when we begin he will help us all he can" as well as "stirring up" as many as he could.²⁶ According to the evidence at hand, Haiti did not seem so far away.

Shortly after receiving his warning from Virginia Governor Moultrie, two black people presented him with letters—supposedly written by someone who knew about the conspiracy—which appeared to corroborate the initial findings. One letter told him to "guard against certain strangers" and "don't let your attention be directed to frenchmen alone." Finally, it advised the governor to "give the most particular orders to your own patrols [sic] in every part of the State, keep up the military duty till the 10th of January at least." Moultrie took the letters seriously and ordered the state militia to be on full alert. South Carolina prepared to quell an insurrection in the making, though no rebellion launched by the enslaved of the Palmetto State actually came to pass.²⁷

Furthermore, by the end of 1793 authorities formed a committee in South Carolina to expel all black emigrants from Saint Domingue along with any other free blacks who came to the state throughout the year. Governor Moultrie issued a proclamation that gave black emigrants from Saint Domingue ten days to leave the state because "there are so many characters amongst them, which remain dangerous to the

²⁶ The Secret Keeper letter was enclosed in William Nelson to James Wood, August 8, 1793, enclosed in SCDAH, Governors' Messages, letter number 577-25, <http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/onlinearchives/ViewImage.aspx?imageNumber=S165009057700000000u.jpg&recordId=284391>

²⁷ A Black to William Moultrie, undated, SCADH, Governors' Messages, letter number 577-15, <http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/onlinearchives/ViewImage.aspx?imageNumber=S165009057700000000m.jpg&recordId=284391>; A Black to William Moultrie, undated, SCADH, Governors' Messages, letter number 577-13, <http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/onlinearchives/ViewImage.aspx?imageNumber=S165009057700000000k.jpg&recordId=284391>; William Moultrie to the South Carolina Senate, November 30, 1793, <http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/onlinearchives/ViewImage.aspx?imageNumber=S165009057700000000e.jpg&recordId=284391>.

welfare of the state." White South Carolinians also looked on with suspicion as rumors circulated about French revolutionaries trying to spread their beliefs by teaming with slaves in order to foment insurrection.²⁸

The "Secret Keeper" letter, along with Randolph's disposition a few months before, also created a stir among Virginians about blacks launching an American version of the Haitian Revolution. Thomas Newton, the militia leader of Norfolk who first discovered the letters about the possible uprising in South Carolina, believed that blacks from Saint Domingue hoped to enter the United States and aid slaves in a war against American slaveholders. He wrote, "I suppose there may be two hundred or more Negroes brought from Cape Francois...they I have no doubt would be ready to operate against us." He pleaded with the lieutenant governor to strengthen the defenses of Norfolk because he believed "in case of insurrection or invasion we should be badly situated." He pleaded that "a few more men" and a "small fort [in Norfolk] would keep all in order." American slave owners, he insisted, needed to remain vigilant against both local and outside forces that might threaten southern slavery.²⁹

Other Virginian slaveholders considered the possibility that blacks held in slavery in the United States might identify with black revolutionaries in the West Indies. When Thomas Jefferson pondered the condition of slaves in the United States, he envisioned a distinctive people without a nation. He understood the relationship between whites and

²⁸ Robert Alderson, "Charleston's Rumored Slave Revolt of 1793," 94-101; *Columbian Herald* and the *Charleston Southern Star* October 19, 1793; *The State Records of South Carolina: Journals of the House of Representatives*, xvi.

²⁹ Thomas Newton to James Wood, undated, SCDAH, Governors' Messages, letter number 577-19, <http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/onlinearchives/ViewImage.aspx?imageNumber=S1650090577000000000.jpg&recordId=284391>

blacks to be similar to two nations constantly at war. Acting on his concern that Saint Domingue's racial warfare might cross the Caribbean, Jefferson worked actively to preempt that possibility. During the Secret Keeper scare, the secretary of state communicated to South Carolina officials that he too had a reliable source informing him of "two Frenchmen, from St. Domingo" who were "setting out from this place for Charleston, with a design to excite an insurrection among the Negroes." The secretary of state and future president viewed slaves in America as well as revolutionaries in Haiti as potential threats to the nation.³⁰

Anxiety about the Haitian Revolution continued to spread throughout the latter half of the 1790s. Southern cities reported allegations of arson and other smaller forms of resistance as products of West Indian influences. In 1795 North Carolina followed South Carolina's example and barred the importation of any slaves from the West Indies. Two years later, Maryland also repealed a law that allowed French slaveholders to bring their slaves with them when they entered the state, joining nearly all of the other slave states in placing new regulations on French immigrants coming to the United States from Saint Domingue, regardless of race. Though slaveholders in the South believed that they shared a common bond with the planters of the West Indies, they also hoped to separate slaveholding in the United States from slavery in the Caribbean.³¹

In 1799 one South Carolinian congressman, Robert Goodloe Harper, insisted that

³⁰ Thomas Jefferson to William Moultrie December 23, 1793 in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 27: 614; Peter S. Onuf, " 'To Declare Them a Free and Independent People': Race, Slavery, and National Identity in Jefferson's Thought," *Journal of the Early Republic* vol 18 (Spring, 1998): 1-7. Tim Matthewson argues that Jefferson connected white freedom with the French Revolution and black freedom to the Haitian Revolution and therefore he supported the French efforts to quash the insurrection in Saint Domingue. See Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy*, 45-46.

³¹ Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, 52-53; Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 97; Hunt, 109.

the French had plans to attack the South and cause a Haitian-style uprising. Though a Federalist who most likely had a bias against France, Harper wrote a warning to his constituents about a slave rebellion being fomented by those connected to the troubled French colony in the Caribbean. He claimed the French Governor of Saint Domingue had prepared "an army of blacks" to land in the South with "a large supply of officers arms and ammunition" in a desperate attempt to reunite the blacks and whites of his colony. One frightening aspect for his readers was the assertion that "missionaries previously sent" already lived among the southern population. Just like the Secret Keepers only years earlier, he claimed he had uncovered the plot by gaining information from one of the conspirators. Rather than happening upon a letter, "black officers who were to be employed in the expedition" supplied the intelligence about the upcoming insurgency. Harper exhorted slaveholders to be observant on their plantations. Some of those who opposed slavery, he claimed, hoped to create another Haitian Revolution in the Palmetto State.³²

Albert Gallatin, a ranking Jeffersonian Republican who later served as the Secretary of the Treasury for three Democratic-Republican presidents, shared his thoughts about Saint Domingue in Congress. The Swiss-born congressman from Pennsylvania worried about what kind of neighbor an independent Saint Domingue would be for the United States. The black population, he insisted, "who received their first education under the lash of the whip, and who have been initiated to liberty only by

³² Robert Goodloe Harper to his constituents, March 20, 1799 *Papers of James A Bayard, 1796-1815* ed. Elizabeth Donnan (Washington D.C: Eleventh Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1913): 90. For a list of a few more Federalists who echoed Harper see Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 44.

that series of rapine pillage, and massacre" that "laid waste and deluged that island in blood," could not "apply themselves to the peaceable cultivation of the country." Instead, he argued, blacks in control of a former colony in the Caribbean would "try to continue to live, as heretofore, by plunder and depredations." Believing that Haitians would want to spread their insurrectionary ideology, he asked his colleagues to recall the fears of the South and pleaded for the nation to be unified in its alarm about a possible invasion—either overtly or in secret—coming from the West Indies.³³

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Americans, particularly in the South, remained on edge about the Haitian Revolution and its connection to the ideas of the French Revolution. Any white Frenchmen, it seemed, could be an infiltrator looking to foment slave rebellion and spread their revolutionary ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Southern whites feared that any black person, free or enslaved, Caribbean or American, could follow the example of the enslaved of Saint Domingue and become a Toussaint Louverture, leading a slave rebellion against white planters in an attempt to claim their freedom. These trepidations churned beneath the surface until the summer of 1800, when American slaveholders believed they had finally come face to face with a Haiti of their own in Virginia's capital city.

Literate and skilled in metalworking as he worked for his master Thomas Prosser, Gabriel's enslaved experience made him different from most slaves in the American South. Roughly 5 percent of enslaved blacks could read. Furthermore, standing at six feet, three inches tall, Prosser towered over most of those he met, inspiring other blacks

³³ *Annals of Congress*, 5th Cong., 3rd sess., 27-52. For more debate about the independence of Saint-Domingue and discussion in Congress about the value of having the small colony become independent, see Brown, *Toussaint's Clause*, 139-142.

in his community to see him as a natural leader. Though whites too saw a commanding quality in Gabriel and viewed him as resourceful, independent, and intelligent—attributes useful to a leader of an insurrection—they worried very little about his potential as an insurrectionist, viewing him as a loyal blacksmith born in America, content in the few extra freedoms he received from his skills.³⁴

In October 1799, however, the former overseer Absalom Johnson caught three slaves attempting to steal a pig from the plantation that he had just recently begun to rent. Johnson saw a slave from his newly leased property, Jupiter, running away with one of his hogs. Two accomplices, Gabriel and his brother Solomon, accompanied him. When Johnson challenged the three black men attempting to stop them, he got more than he bargained. Gabriel fought the former overseer, at one point biting off a significant part of his ear. Recognizing that he had lost this brief but violent battle, Johnson walked away and instead retaliated with the strongest weapon white Virginians had against blacks—the law. Though the guilty verdict Gabriel received came with the severe punishment of hanging, the court granted Prosser the clemency of the clergy who asked that his sentence be commuted. Rather than swinging on the gallows for his crime, the rebellious slave received thirty-nine lashes and a branding of the letter "T" on his thumb. Blacksmith Prosser had survived his first strike against southern slavery that kept him and his relatives in bondage.³⁵

³⁴ Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993): 20-22. Two books that give the best examination of Gabriel's Rebellion are the Egerton's book cited above and James Sidbury, *Ploughshares Into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³⁵ Bert M. Mutersbaugh, "The Background of Gabriel's Insurrection, *The Journal of Negro History* 68 (Spring, 1983):209-211; Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, 55-56.

Those intent on rebelling against the status quo and overturning an entire cultural system do not do so overnight. This was especially true in a society wary of slave plots. Rather, insurrections and insurrectionists are created over time. Though Gabriel actively resisted slavery when he attempted to steal from a farm and fight a slaveholder, those actions served as a beginning. A year later, the two accomplices who had once helped him pilfer a pig would enlist in his army in a concerted attack against slaveholding Richmond. By the end of 1800, the would-be insurrectionists Gabriel and Jupiter would be executed; Solomon would only escape the gallows by providing incriminating testimony against other black rebels. White Virginians would be left with an uneasy feeling that they had only narrowly escaped their own version of Haiti.³⁶

Talk about overturning the established power structure filled the air during the spring of 1800. White citizens debated who would win the presidential election, John Adams or Thomas Jefferson. Later, some would even refer to the possible transformation as "the Revolution of 1800." As this political event occupied the thoughts of white men, Gabriel walked the city of Richmond, Virginia, with a different revolution in mind. With whites dividing over the upcoming election, 1800 seemed an opportune time for a successful slave uprising. First, Gabriel plotted about how he might free himself and his neighbors. Then, in the blacksmith shop at his master's Brookfield plantation, he revealed the plan to Solomon and another slave to overthrow Virginia's slavery system.³⁷

³⁶ Philip J. Schwarz, "Gabriel's Challenge: Slaves and Crime in Late Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 90 (July, 1982): 283-309.

³⁷ Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 50-68 describes and examines the planning of the insurrection in deep detail. See also Lacy Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 49-54 supplies a brief overview of the rebellion. For most of the primary evidence and testimony of the plot, all derived from white investigations and prosecutions of the accused during the insurrection scare see *Calendar of the Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts from January 1, 1799 to December 31, 1807* xi ed. H. W. Flournoy (Richmond, 1890):

Gabriel explained the blueprint of the uprising to his collaborators. After months of crafting the blades of wheat scythes into swords with his and his allies' skilled hands, Gabriel would gather his army of Richmond slaves in his blacksmith shop or the surrounding woods. As Solomon Prosser later testified, the conspirators anticipated giving weapons to hundreds of men on horseback. After first killing Thomas Prosser, Gabriel's owner, and Absalom Johnson, the man who had caused Gabriel's back to be savaged by the whip and finger branded, the group of insurgents would march on the capital. There enslaved allies, emboldened by the capture of one of Virginia's oldest cities, would join them.³⁸

Once inside the city the large group would split into three. One would seize weapons supplied in the capitol building, and then take James Monroe hostage as he slept in the Governor's Mansion. Another would set fire to the warehouse district as a diversion, while the final group would fortify a main entrance to the city and set up defensive positions. Significantly, Gabriel did not perceive a stark racial divide in Virginia as many whites did. He only intended to strike against slaveholders, not whites in general. Like insurrectionists in the French West Indies, he believed his call for citizenship would spur poor whites, also excluded from the political power, to join his rebellion. Those not directly complicit in advancing slavery in the United States would be spared his wrath. The slave leader planned to carry a banner inscribed with the words "death or Liberty," a phrase whites believed served as an inversion of Patrick Henry's

140-174. See also the *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1800* (Richmond: Thomas Nicholson, 1800): 26-33; Douglas R. Egerton, "Gabriel's Conspiracy and the Election of 1800," *Journal of Southern History* vol. 56 (May 1990): 191-214.

³⁸ Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 58-60; *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, 9: 141-142.

famous comment, but may easily have come to Gabriel's mind because of that phrase's common usage during the Haitian Revolution. "Liberte Ou La Mort" had been a slogan during the fighting and eventually headlined that nation's declaration of independence written only a few years after the Virginian's planned rebellion.³⁹

A summer rainstorm on August 30, 1800, prevented Gabriel from putting his plan into action. Flooding caused by heavy rains prevented many of the recruits from other plantations around Richmond from joining him at the assigned meeting place. As the small rivers rose from the deluge, the wooden bridges that connected Brookfield to the rest of the city became impassable. Some whites in Richmond noticed that, unlike most Saturday nights when slaves from the rural areas came into town, some of the enslaved within the urban areas seemed to be trying to go away from the city. However, they paid little attention and declined to explore the reason behind these activities. The storm, however, prevented travel around the capital of Virginia; only those insurgents nearest to Gabriel showed up ready to fight. Gabriel decided to reschedule his plot and postpone the rebellion. He sent word that the insurrection would start the ensuing night.⁴⁰

The delay caused some of Gabriel's crew to have second thoughts about their intended uprising. Having made the trip through the downpour only to see fewer men than expected caused one of the would-be rebels to doubt the slave leader. Pharaoh, a skilled slave from a neighboring plantation, changed his mind about participating in the insurrection. Unlike Gabriel and many of the other members of the insurrectionary

³⁹ Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 58-60. *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, 9: 147; For similar examples in the West Indies see Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, 24-29, 166-168; The Haitian Declaration of Independence can be found at the National Archives of the United Kingdom.

⁴⁰ Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 69; *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, 9:164-165.

conspiracy, Pharaoh had a long and close relationship with his white owner's family, Mosby Sheppard. He also may have believed that telling his master about Gabriel's plans might win freedom for himself and his family without partaking in violence. After all, he remembered, four years earlier Mosby Sheppard had allowed a slave to purchase his own freedom for a discounted price. Maybe the slaveholder would do it again.⁴¹

Pharaoh faced a tough decision—he could try to obtain freedom for himself and thousands of other blacks in Virginia by fighting alongside Gabriel, or he could try to obtain freedom for just himself and possibly his family by betraying the plot to slaveholders and becoming a traitor. He chose the latter, first telling a black enslaved leader of his plantation trusted by the Sheppard family and eventually unveiling his secret to Mosby Sheppard himself. He named Gabriel Prosser as the slave in charge of the upcoming rebellion. That night two other slaves originally associated with the scheme against Richmond also informed their owners of the conspiracy and divulged details of the insurrection plot.⁴²

The next day Governor James Monroe learned of the conspiracy and immediately took measures to secure the city. He also tried to keep the information away from the public in order to prevent a panic. The governor moved the weapons away from the capital and into the penitentiary, a building more easily defended in case of a battle. Next he mobilized a number of regiments in the state militia. Finally, he launched a search party for the insurrectionists, which captured collaborators working with Gabriel. Within ten days roughly thirty conspirators—though not Gabriel—had been found and arrested

⁴¹ Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 70-72.

⁴² Ibid.

by Virginia authorities. On September 9, Monroe ordered the slave trials to begin. Upon the jury's verdict the hangman received twenty people to be executed for insurrection. Major threats to slavery would not be tolerated.⁴³

At the end of September, Virginia authorities captured Gabriel in Norfolk and brought the blacksmith back in iron chains to Richmond, where he received a death sentence for his crimes against the state. Large crowds gathered to watch the prospective black rebel executed, a sharp warning against challenging slaveholding supremacy. Unlike his compatriots, who were nearly all hanged with a fellow rebel dying by their side, Gabriel was hanged from the gallows alone. Richmond's slave owners survived unscathed the first large and organized slave conspiracy of the new nation, but they were shaken. Similarities to Gabriel Prosser's planned insurrection and the Haitian Revolution certainly did not go unnoticed by slaveholding Americans.⁴⁴

The slave insurrection on Saint Domingue may very well have inspired Gabriel and his fellow insurrectionists to secure liberty through violence. Stories about the Haitian Revolution had run rampant throughout the 1790s, and some of Virginia's slaves undoubtedly came into contact with that information. One way Gabriel could have intentionally modeled himself after Toussaint was in the creation of an "army" of black rebels. Throughout their testimony, the black conspirators referred to their leader as "General Gabriel" and talked about serving under his "command." Gabriel as general had "appointed" another as "second in command." Other leaders under Gabriel served as "captains," while those without much knowledge of the plan acted as "foot soldiers" who

⁴³ Ibid., 78-94.

⁴⁴ Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 110-111; Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, 125-128.

had "enlisted" in Gabriel's Army.⁴⁵

Newspapers throughout the United States reported Gabriel's insurrection and often used the military language embraced by the black insurrectionists. One Philadelphia newspaper remarked that the instigator of the rebellion, a "villain assuming to himself the appellation of *General*," tried to lead the uprising in Richmond. One Virginian newspaper mocked "General Gabriel" who "manifested the utmost composure; and with the true spirit of heroism seems willing to resign his high office and even his life rather than gratify the officious enquiries of the Governor, which may endanger the necks of his dark satellites." Though many whites derided his claim to be a military leader, Gabriel's identification of his group using martial terms forced whites in the United States to recognize the authority he had wielded as a leader of a black corps of insurrectionary warriors. In North Carolina, one southerner insisted that Gabriel planned to take the name Bonaparte after he killed "all the white males and elderly women" found in Richmond. These stories undoubtedly reminded readers of the tales from Saint Domingue that they had read less than a decade before.⁴⁶

Gabriel definitely viewed his planned insurrection as a battle in a war. While being inspired by Toussaint, he also allegedly compared himself to George Washington as he stood defiantly at trial. He saw his actions as being no different than the Father of

⁴⁵ *Calendar of State Papers of Virginia*, 146-147, 164-165; James Sidbury, "Saint Domingue in Virginia: Ideology, Local Meanings, and Resistance to Slavery, 1790-1800," *Journal of Southern History* 63 (August 1997): 531-552.

⁴⁶ New London, Ct *Bee* September 12, 1800; Philadelphia *Gazette* September 18, 1800; *The Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette* October 4, 1800; Charles Harris to Robert Harris September 18, 1800 in "The Harris Letters" in *The James Sprunt Historical Publications* ed. H.M. Wagstaff (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1916): 83-84, Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

the Country, who strove to obtain the liberty of his countrymen in the course of the American Revolution. During his confession Gabriel's brother Solomon discussed how the insurrection planned to make war on the whites of Virginia. He stated that Gabriel had come into contact with a French veteran from the Battle of Yorktown who had volunteered to train the insurrectionists in the arts of war. The prospect a black rebel leader finding his own version of Lafayette frightened many in the South. The claim of whites helping blacks revolt against slavery would be repeated during other insurrection scares in the United States throughout the antebellum period.⁴⁷

Slave resistance, whether at home or abroad, affected American politics throughout the antebellum period. The aftermath of conspiracies often resulted in attempts by politicians to assess blame on their political opponents and also caused southerners to place themselves within the larger framework of insurrections within the Atlantic world. The reaction to the Richmond slave conspiracy was no different. White Americans, from both slave states and free states, joined Gabriel in connecting his insurrection plot to the Haitian Revolution. Federalists, in Virginia as well as throughout New England, chastised their Republican opponents for supporting the ideals of the French Revolution and focused on the two Frenchmen supposedly involved in Gabriel's

⁴⁷ *Calendar of State Papers of Virginia, IX*, 147, 150-152, 164; Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, 261. Earlier historians discounted the mention of two Frenchmen working with the slave rebels, however, there is hard evidence that indeed there was some whites of French origin mostly likely involved, though their connection to Saint-Domingue or the French Revolution is still unknown. See Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 182-185. For an earlier example see Jack D. L. Holmes, "The Abortive Slave Revolt of Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, 1795," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 11 (Autumn, 1970): 341-362. Haitians and Frenchmen became a topic in other insurrection scares as well, especially in Louisiana in the decade after the Louisiana Purchase. See John Watkins to John Graham September 6, 1805 in *The Territorial Papers of the United States vol. 9* ed. Clarence E. Carter (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940). See also Junius Rodriguez, "Rebellion on the Rivier Road: The Ideology and Influence of Louisiana's German Coast Slave Insurrection of 1811," in *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America* eds. John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999): 65-88.

Rebellion. Just as the rhetoric spurred the uprising of blacks in Saint Domingue, so too, some Federalists warned, would it inspire blacks to rise against their masters in the South.⁴⁸

One Federalist newspaper editor sneered at Jefferson's connection to France and argued his election to the presidency would make it "probable that the unhappy negroes may again be deluded by his *French alien friends* to make a general uprising." This appeal to white southerners to worry about insurrections remained obvious. To northerners, however, the Federalist explained how they too needed to worry about slave uprisings. He wrote that due to "the white people in the lower and middle parts of the southern states [being] very few in number in comparison to the blacks," the South would rely on militia troops from New England "being dragged over 1000 miles from home to expose their lives to the cut-throat negroes" in order to quell a rebellion. The North and South, he argued, had intimately been linked in defending against slave resistance and maintaining the security of a republic for whites only.⁴⁹

While Federalists pointed to the French Revolution, some Democratic-Republicans directed their attacks to an event much closer to home—Haiti. Federalists complained about attacks from a Jeffersonian newspaper accusing President Adams of supporting Toussaint and the Haitian Revolution. The *Aurora* wrote that Federalists secretly collaborated "with the British to establish an independent empire of the Blacks in St. Domingo" and that Gabriel's attack against the slave system stemmed from a

⁴⁸ Douglas R. Egerton, "Gabriel's Conspiracy and the Election of 1800," *Journal of Southern History* 56 (May 1990): 191-214. For further discussion of how slavery intersected with politics during this period see Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 9-86.

⁴⁹ *Boston Gazette* October 23, 1800.

conspiracy between Toussaint and slaves of Virginia and South Carolina with the support from the Federalist administration in Washington.⁵⁰

After the election of 1800 and with victory attained, Jeffersonians across the country debated ways to strengthen the security of the slave system following Gabriel's Rebellion. Virginians understood that Gabriel had struck a weak point in the defenses of their slave society. One newspaper correspondent reported that the slaves "could scarcely had [sic] failed of success" as the whites in and around Richmond had been caught by surprise and without weapons. Changes needed to be made, they believed.⁵¹

In the aftermath of the failed slave insurrection, Governor Monroe urged the Virginia legislature to take steps towards strengthening the state's safeguards against slave resistance. Newspapers urged a variety of remedies, from strengthening the size of the militia to ending private manumissions. One citizen from Richmond, St. George Tucker, took the opportunity offered by Gabriel's Rebellion to examine slavery as a whole. He suggested a plan to slowly end slavery in Virginia and proposed that the state enact a policy of colonization. He wrote that living in a nation that valued the ideas of republicanism gave those enslaved an insatiable desire for freedom that would only produce more uprisings. Tucker argued, therefore, that introducing rigorous new restrictions on blacks would only make the "thousands of slaves vindictive and impatient." This, along with the growth of the black population, made the entire system of slavery unsustainable. Since he believed that racial desegregation could never exist

⁵⁰ Philadelphia *Gazette* September 9, 1800.

⁵¹ Quoted from Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Travelers and outlaws, episodes in American History*, (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1889): 185. This book is a collection of articles that appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* during the antebellum period. See Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America*, 118.

without constant hostility between the black and white races, Tucker contended that the only solution was gradual emancipation and the exportation of those freed to a colony to the "western side of the Mississippi."⁵²

At the federal level, Thomas Jefferson examined the idea of colonization of blacks outside of the American continent upon a request by the Virginia Assembly. In a letter responding to them, the president admitted that Haiti, "where the blacks are established into a sovereignty de facto," offered "the most promising" place to send American freed blacks because those "exiled for acts deemed criminal by us" might be considered "meritorious" to them. However, in the very next sentence he also rejected the idea because the black American exiles sent to the Caribbean might convince the rebels from the former French colony to attack the South in "concert with their brethren remaining here." Jefferson faced the conundrum of finding a place to diffuse slavery from the United States without giving blacks further opportunity to enact their revenge he presumed they all wanted.⁵³

Jefferson's personal attitude about the Haitian Revolution pervaded his administration. In 1802 postmaster general Gideon Granger, from Connecticut, expressed concerns about employing blacks to carry the mail. He wrote, referencing the slave states with large black populations, "After the scenes which St. Domingo has exhibited to the world, we cannot be too cautious in attempting to prevent similar evils in the four Southern States, where there are, particularly in the eastern and old settled parts of them,

⁵² Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 54-61; St. George Tucker, *Letter to a Member of the General Assembly of Virginia on the Subject of the Late Conspiracy of the Slaves with a Proposal for Their Colonization* (Baltimore: Bonsal and Niles, 1801): quotes from 10, 18.

⁵³ Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe November 24, 1801, quoted in Philip Slaughter; *The Virginian History of African Colonization* (Macfarlane and Fergusson, 1855): 4.

so great a proportion of blacks as to hazard the tranquility and happiness of the free citizens." To many whites Gabriel Prosser exemplified skilled blacks, both free and enslaved, that could undermine slavery in the United States just as they had in the West Indies.⁵⁴

After pointing to different slave conspiracies being uncovered, including Gabriel's, the postmaster general insisted that allowing blacks to carry the mail increased "their knowledge of natural rights, of men and things, or that affords them an opportunity of associating, acquiring, and communicating sentiments, and of establishing a chain or line of intelligence, must increase your hazard, because it increases their means of effecting their object." He further maintained that black post riders had the ability to communicate with other slaves and gain information on white defenses while at the same time "becoming teachers to their brethren." Treating all blacks as potential insurrectionists, the only solution he could conceive, would be to "prevent the evil than to cure it." He recommended ending the practice of black mail carriers as the most prescient solution, a preemptive strike against an anticipated rebellion that might occur in the future.⁵⁵

During his time in office President Jefferson tried to distance the United States from the Haitian Revolution while also profiting from France's struggles to maintain control of their colony. At the beginning of his term, and in light of Gabriel's rebellion, Jefferson initially supported Napoleon Bonaparte's attempt to subdue Toussaint's power

⁵⁴ *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States, From the First Session of the First to the Section Session of the Twenty-Second Congress Class VII*, eds. Walter Lowrie and Walter S. Franklin, (Washington D.C: Gales and Seaton, 1834): 27.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

in the Caribbean and return Saint Domingue to French control. However, he soon changed course upon receiving intelligence from England that Bonaparte intended to expand his empire onto the American continent. Watching as Bonaparte sent a group of troops to Saint Domingue to regain France's power in the Caribbean, Jefferson reconsidered his position, fearing that a large-scale war between French forces and the black army of Toussaint could spread to the United States. One scenario Jefferson described to Secretary of State James Madison depicted the French sending the "most warlike" black revolutionaries, who would never submit to re-enslavement from Saint-Domingue, to Louisiana. The South seemed too vulnerable. When Bonaparte's general arrived in America, the president decided against supporting the recapture of Saint Domingue. This included a refusal to change John Adams' policy of allowing American merchants to trade with Toussaint's forces. After nearly two years of brutal fighting between a ravaged French military force and black freedom fighters, the United States had a new neighbor officially: Haiti, the product of the only slave rebellion that had successfully created an independent state.⁵⁶

France paid a steep price for trying to re-enslave their former colony in the West Indies. With the destruction of his expeditionary force—from both the black army's resistance and an epidemic of yellow fever—Napoleon Bonaparte saw his dream of an American empire collapse. While French troops died on the island of Hispaniola, Spain issued a blockade of the United States from the port of New Orleans that spurred President Jefferson to send James Monroe as part of a mission to France with the order to

⁵⁶ Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy*, 97-115; Tench Coxe to James Madison, November 28, 1801, *The Papers of James Madison* Secretary of State Series vol 2, eds. Mary Hackett, J. C. Staff, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Purdue (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1986): 281-282.

offer the French leader ten million dollars to purchase the city of New Orleans and the Floridas. Fed up with the Americas and militarily weakened by Haiti's stout resistance, Bonaparte abandoned Louisiana and ordered Talleyrand, the French foreign minister, to offer the entire Louisiana territory to the United States. For the price of just three cents an acre, amounting to a total of fifteen million dollars, James Monroe and Robert Livingston, the American minister to France, returned home with a treaty that doubled the size of their country—and vastly increased the amount of slave territory.⁵⁷

Though the Haitian Revolution helped strengthen the United States by allowing the new nation to gain Louisiana, an independent black republic so close to American shores also created political issues for Jefferson and his predecessors. The debate over whether or not to formally recognize the Republic of Haiti came almost immediately following Haiti's de facto independence. Once in office, Thomas Jefferson swiftly acquiesced to southern slaveholders in Congress demanding a trade embargo and nonrecognition of the only other independent republic in the New World. The United States would not officially accept Haiti as a neighbor until after the beginning of the Civil War, yet over the following decades the black republic in the West Indies would frequently re-enter the political debate of the United States.⁵⁸

Beginning in the colonial period the importation of Africans to America made some slaveholders wary about the increase of a black population they considered

⁵⁷ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005): 108-114.

⁵⁸ Tim Matthewson, "Jefferson and the Nonrecognition of Haiti," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 140 (March 1996): 22-23; Ludwell Lee Montague, *Haiti and the United States, 1714-1938* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1940): 81-90.

potentially dangerous. The Haitian Revolution reinforced this belief, and the fear of slave insurrection influenced American foreign policy throughout the early nineteenth century. Some southerners saw the end of the slave trade as a way to weaken black power in the South. When slaveholders looked to the events of French Saint Domingue they often saw a demographic nightmare that raised suspicions lasting in the South all the way to the Civil War, of a black population that had grown too large for whites to control. Some advocates of restricting the further importation of slaves to the United States argued that the slave population needed to be curbed in order to maintain a secure slave society unlike Saint-Domingue. In 1800, years before Congress could act to federally ban the importation of Africans to the United States, one Virginian who favored curtailing the slave trade wrote, "the safety of [the southern states] depend on a great accession of the white population." A larger white population would be needed in order to prevent the American version of the Haitian Revolution.⁵⁹

This idea was not rare. Many in Virginia viewed the potential of a large enslaved population wreaking havoc against the southern system of slavery. For example another Virginian, William Leckie, who ran a dry goods business that connected him to both England and the Caribbean, stated his concerns clearly, writing, "The other [problem] is the encreasing [sic] quantity of blacks, who in Virginia...amount to 350,000, who are all native, many of whom can read and write, will perhaps prove the bane of all the Southern States, and by this struggle for freedom and involve nearly one half the Union in Civil Wars." He believed that as long as the enslaved population grew, the white South would

⁵⁹ Richmond *Virginia Argus* October 3, 1800.

always be at risk of having to fight a war against those they held in bondage.⁶⁰

States in the Lower South rarely considered the suspension of the slave trade due to moral qualms, but instead many sought to prohibit trade into their states in order to protect their security. The calamity of the Haitian Revolution impacted the American planter class and their devotion to the importation of more black people to the South by challenging the notion that further inflation of the black population of the country through the importation of African or Caribbean slaves had little consequence in regards to the security of the American slave system. A potential power struggle between the white and black populations seemed suddenly more real for many southerners who pondered slaveholders' fate in Haiti. If former slaves could successfully fight against Napoleon, they worried, what could they do in America?⁶¹

In 1807 Congress passed legislation ending the international slave trade to the United States in the beginning of 1808, as the Constitution permitted. During the debate about enforcing the prohibition, one Pennsylvania congressman asked the House of Representatives "to look at St. Domingo" as a reason to end the slave trade. The Haitian Revolution showed, he contended, that blacks held in slavery could "learn the rights of man" and learn to become "proficient in the art of war" in claiming them. He further believed that Europeans, who already had "armed Indians against us," could also "arm the negroes." He insisted in keeping the black population "as numerous as is consistent with safety" and thought it to "be extreme impolicy [sic] to import more" without undermining

⁶⁰ William Leckie to Alexander Ban[e] August 15, 1802, Leckie Family Papers, William Clements Library University of Michigan.

⁶¹ David Hugh Connolly, Jr, "A Question of Honor: State Character and the Lower South's Defense of the African Slave Trade in Congress, 1789-1807," (PhD diss. Rice University, 2008): 25-35.

national security. Northern arguments for ending the slave trade to keep the country safe also helped to isolate the proslavery faction from the Deep South who wished to keep the trade open. On March 2, 1807, believing it to be "in the best interests of our country" President Jefferson signed the prohibition of the African slave trade into law with very little objection from the South.⁶²

Banning the importation of slaves, however, did not stifle fears that West Indian blacks wanted to secretly invade the United States South and spark an uprising for the long term. A panic caused by a slave conspiracy connected to Haiti appeared again in the American vernacular on May 25, 1822, in Charleston, South Carolina.⁶³ Just as in Gabriel's Rebellion, a black informant told a slaveholder about plans by blacks in the city to rise up against the slaveholding class en masse. Peter, a slave, told his owner's wife

⁶² Connolly, Jr., "A Question of Honor," 219-274; Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 201; John Custis IV to Mr Loyd, 1736 in Josephine Little Zuppan, ed., *The Letterbook of John Custis IV of Williamsburg, 1717-1742* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005): 158-159; *Annals of Congress*, 8 Cong., 1 sess., 995-96; *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents vol. 1* ed. James D. Richardson (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896): 408.

⁶³ Much has been made in recent historiography about whether or not a real plot by Denmark Vesey actually existed or whether white slaveholders purposely exaggerated the conspiracy in order to gain more power. Michael Johnson has contended that Denmark Vesey actually did not plan to launch an insurrection against Charleston. He argues that South Carolina leaders, along with willing blacks, used rumor to condemn Vesey for challenging the orthodoxy of South Carolina's system of white supremacy by insisting in racial equality in the Bible. See Michael P. Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators" *William and Mary Quarterly* LVIII, 4 (October, 2001): 915-976. In the issue that followed his provocative article, Edward Pearson, Douglas Egerton, David Robertson, Philip Morgan, Thomas J. Davis, Winthrop Jordan, and Robert Paquette responded to Johnson. Johnson built his argument on the work of Richard C. Wade, see Richard C. Wade, "The Vesey Plot: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Southern History* 30 (May 1964): 143-161. See Robert Goss, ed., "Forum: The Making of a Slave Conspiracy II," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59 (January 2002): 135-202. See also Douglas R. Egerton, " 'Why did they not Preach Up This Thing': Denmark Vesey and Revolutionary Theology," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 100 (October 1999): 298-318; Robert L. Paquette and Douglas R. Egerton, "Of Facts and Fables: New Light on the Denmark Vesey Affair," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 105 (January 2004): 8-35; Robert L. Paquette, "From Rebellion to Revisionism: The Continuing Debate About the Denmark Vesey Affair," *Journal of the Historical Society* (Fall 2004): 291-334; and William W. Freehling, "Denmark Vesey's Peculiar Reality," in *New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Stampp* eds. Robert H. Abzug and Stephen E. Maizlish (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986): 25-50. Lacy Ford provides a concise, but informative, overview of the Vesey Scare as well as its affects on paternalism in *Deliver us From Evil*, 207-237.

and son that at the market, another slave, an artisan named William Paul, had informed him of a plan "to shake off our bondage" and said that if he agreed to join he would "show you the man, who has the list of names, who will take yours down." Upon being made aware of the rumor, South Carolina leaders placed the city on alert and created an investigative committee to seek out the possible insurrectionists and stop the rebellion before it began.⁶⁴

After the conclusion of the probe to uncover the depth of the conspiracy, South Carolinian authorities indicted Denmark Vesey, a black carpenter and preacher who had paid for his freedom by winning a lottery, as the mastermind of the alleged plot. Much like Gabriel's Rebellion, the plot, according to trial records, revolved around skilled black laborers, both free and enslaved, in Charleston. A large portion of those convicted in the slave revolt had a skill related to the shipping industry of the city. In the aftermath, numerous blacks received the sentence of either death or banishment from the United States. The state sent some of the exiles to be sold into slavery in the Caribbean.⁶⁵

Haiti became a chief element of the discussion during the trials of the Charleston conspiracy. Denmark Vesey had been born in the Caribbean and spent time in Saint Domingue during the Haitian Revolution. One of the charged insurrectionists, Rolla,

⁶⁴ James Hamilton, *An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection Among a Portion of the Blacks of the City* (Charleston: Joseph W. Ingraham, 1822): 5, Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/hamilton/hamilton.html>. Two other important primary sources that discuss the Vesey scare are Lionel H. Kennedy and Thomas Parker, *An Official Report of the Trials of Sundry Negroes Charged with an Attempt to Raise an Insurrection in the State of South Carolina; Preceded by an Introduction and Narrative; and in an Appendix, a Report on the Trials of Four Whites Persons, on Indictments for Attempting to Excite the Slaves to Insurrection* (Charleston: James R. Schenk, 1822) and Document B: Evidence, Governor's Messages, no. 1328, series no, S165009, Records of the General Assembly, SCDAAH.

⁶⁵ Hamilton, *An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection Among a Portion of the Blacks of the City*, 47-50.

testified that Vesey told his followers they would receive assistance from Haiti and Africa. Vesey told his followers that Haitians would "come over and cut up the white people if we only made the motion here first." Others also included references to gaining help from the Caribbean in their testimonies. According to the official account of the conspiracy, after freeing themselves and sparking the uprising in the city, the insurgent slaves planned to "get money from the Banks, and the goods from the stores" and "hoist sail for Saint Domingo," where Vesey "expected some armed vessels" to offer protection to them as they escaped the United States. One slave's final words before being hanged claimed that Vesey had "the habit of reading to me all the Passages in the newspapers that related to St. Domingo" along with reading passages from antislavery members of Congress who, he told other blacks in Charleston, were "the black man's friend."⁶⁶

Michael Johnson has shown that the testimonies of the enslaved often came after severe emotional and physical trauma that he—rightfully—contends make these confessions unreliable. However, even if the indicted slaves did just tell the slaveholding captors what they wanted to hear, the testimonies show how real the perception of danger from Haiti had become in the minds of the master class. President Jean Pierre Boyer of Haiti had indeed invited free blacks in the United States to join his nation as he attempted to recruit a skilled labor force to his country. He advertised free land for black immigrants in newspapers throughout the country, including Charleston. Vesey presumably believed that he could buy his way into exile in Haiti despite the fact that allowing rebellious slaves to enter his republic might undermine Boyer's already

⁶⁶ *An official report of the trials of sundry Negroes*, 62-68 (first quotation on 62, second on 68); Douglas R. Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey Revised and Updated Version* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2004): 3-26.

maligned reputation in the community of nations. The rebel leader even sent letters to the Haitian president asking him to prepare for his arrival. Whether the conspiracy had actually been planned and readied to launch or simply devised by slaveholders as a way to reestablish their control over South Carolina politics, the connection to Haiti served as a successful bogeyman that not only strengthened the political standing of slaveholders both at home and in the nation's capital.⁶⁷

In the wake of the Vesey conspiracy, concerns over the possibility of slave insurrections rose once again in the South. The trial records and confessions of some of the enslaved charged in the plot became public knowledge throughout the region as newspapers published some of the testimony. Other southerners from neighboring states worried that some of rebels who had planned to raze Charleston had escaped authorities and fled to their state. For instance, as part of its reporting on the South Carolina insurrection scare, the *Alexandria Herald* in Virginia wrote that "sixteen negroes of colour, supposed to have been engaged" in the Vesey affair, had been caught near the northern border of South Carolina, but assured its readers that "the necessary steps to secure the citizens from any accident that might occur" had been taken to "suppress every similar attempt."⁶⁸ Though the newspaper does not give an account of what happened next regarding the sixteen alleged escapees, the article shows how rampant the fear of a possible Haiti-like rebellion coming to the United States South had become.

⁶⁷ Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 136-138; Examination and Confession of Monday Gell, July 23, 1822, in *Designs against Charleston*, 244-246; Michael P. Johnson, Denmark Vesey and his Co-Conspirators," 919.

⁶⁸ *Augusta Chronicle and Georgia Advertiser* September 9, 1822; *Alexandria Herald* July 19, 1822.

Slaveholders in South Carolina took advantage of the crisis in order to use the machinery of government to strengthen their control over the state's slave society. Established in 1823, the South Carolina Association vowed to police the slave system in Charleston and soon bred offshoots in other parts of the Palmetto State. Created by and filled with many of the most prominent men of South Carolina, the South Carolina Association worked with legal authorities to monitor the black population they feared might become unsettled and resistant towards the power of the slaveholding class. One member explained that the organization was created in order to restore security by enforcing regulations of the black population that had become too lenient, and which therefore threatened the safety of all whites, regardless of their status as a slaveholder.⁶⁹

South Carolina slaveholders also used the insurrection to increase their control over free blacks who came to their state on foreign ships. Promoted by the South Carolina Association, the Negro Seaman Act required black sailors who arrived on foreign ships at the port of Charleston to be detained and held in jail until their ship left the city. Other southern states followed South Carolina's lead and passed similar laws. Challenged in court by the British as unconstitutional, the defense of the statute by the South Carolina Attorney General Benjamin Hunt showed the anxiety those free blacks, especially those connected to the British West Indies, engendered in American slaveholders. Hunt claimed that without the law, South Carolina would see the "moral pestilence which a

⁶⁹ Alan F. January, "The South Carolina Association: An Agency for Race Control in Antebellum Charleston," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 78 (July 1977): 191-201.

free intercourse with foreign negroes will produce" and that the slaveholding lawmakers had written the law based on "the right of self preservation."⁷⁰

While many South Carolinians blamed antislavery rhetoric during the debate over admitting Missouri as a free or slave state for the Denmark Vesey scare, others saw it as an opportunity to show that the slaveholders needed the North as an ally in order to preserve slavery against an uprising by those held in bondage in the South. Reverend Richard Furman, trying to quell any backlash against evangelicalism that stemmed from much of Vesey's plot developing in the African Methodist Church, released a pamphlet explaining how northerners and southerners had to work together to maintain the security of the South against insurrections. He told his southern readers that blacks needed to be reminded "however numerous they are in some parts of these Southern States, they, yet, are not, even including all descriptions, bond and free, in the United States, but little more than one sixth part of the whole number of inhabitants." American slaves should know that South Carolina was not Haiti.⁷¹

Furman attacked abolitionist Christianity while simultaneously insisting that the North would protect the South from the violence of a slave uprising. He stated, "In some parts of our Union there are Citizens, who favor the idea of general emancipation; yet,

⁷⁰ Ibid; "Philip M. Hamer, "Great Britain, the United States, and the Negro Seamen Acts, 1822-1848," *The Journal of Southern History* 1 (February, 1935): 3-28; *The argument of Benj. Faneuil Hunt, in the case of the arrest of the person claiming to be a British seaman, under the 3d section of the State Act of Dec. 1822, in relation to Negroes, &c. before the Hon. Judge Johnson, Circuit Judge of the United States, for 6th Circuit: ex parte Henry Elkison, claiming to be a subject of His Britannic Majesty, vs. Francis G. Deliesseline, sheriff of Charleston District* (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1823): 7.

⁷¹ Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007): 141-178; Richard Furman, *Rev. Dr. Richard Farnan's Exposition of the Views of the Baptists, Relative to the Coloured Population in the United States In A Communication to the Governor of South-Carolina 2nd edition* (Charleston: 1838): 4.

were they to see slaves in our Country, in arms, wading through blood and carnage to effect their purpose, they would do what both their duty and interest would require." Northerners would not have the stomach to watch blacks slaughter whites in the South. Just as antislavery northerners used national security to buoy their arguments against the slave trade, proslavery southerners used the fear of slave insurrection, with Haiti as the main example, to engage in the discussion of slavery and push northern politicians towards a proslavery national policy during the 1820s and 1830s.⁷²

Near the end of 1825, Mexico, and then Columbia, asked the United States to attend a conference of many recently independent nations of South America to be held in Panama. President John Quincy Adams readily accepted the invitation and asked Congress to approve sending a delegation to what became known as the Pan American Conference. Southerners wasted no time in attacking the very notion of the conference, crying out against acknowledging Haiti's independence and wanting to prevent the United States from participating in any confederation with their non-white neighbors in the Western Hemisphere.⁷³

As the Senate discussed the issue of providing a mission to the Pan American Conference, official recognition of the Republic of Haiti brought the most vitriolic language to the debate. Claiming they feared the insurrection of their slaves, most southern politicians insisted that any formal acceptance of Haiti would lead to the

⁷² Furman, *Views of the Baptists, Relative to the Coloured Population in the United States*, 5.

⁷³ Ludwell Lee Montague, *Haiti And The United States, 1714-1938* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1940): 52-53; Ralph Sanders, "Congressional Reaction in the United States to the Panama Congress of 1826," *The Americas* 11 (Oct. 1954): 141-143; Charles Wilson Hackett, "The Development of John Quincy Adams's Policy with Respect to an American Confederation and the Panama Congress, 1822-1825," *American Historical Review* 8 (November 1928): 496-526.

repetition of its revolution in America. Granting the republic and its majority black population recognition as an equal on the world stage, they worried, condoned Haiti's destructive uprising of enslaved and freed blacks against slaveholders, threatening white hegemony inside the United States as well as abroad. Many on the proslavery side of Congress worked passionately to prevent a formal relationship between Haiti and the United States of America. Playing upon fears of insurrection, they were able to gain strong public support in both the North and South.⁷⁴

The fear of insurrection prompted proslavery senators to reject any formal relationship between the Republic of Haiti and the United States because they believed that any kind of equality officially granted by the federal government to blacks on the world stage undermined white authority over the enslaved. One of the most vocal congressmen discussing Haiti during the debate regarding the Panama conference in 1826, Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, railed against any formal recognition of the Caribbean republic. He said, "Our policy towards Haiti, the old San Domingo, has been fixed, Mr. President, for three and thirty years. We trade with her, but no diplomatic relations have been established between us. And Why? Because the peace of eleven States in this Union will not permit the fruits of a successful negro insurrection to be exhibited among them." The white North and South needed to be united against Haiti in order to protect southern slavery and the security of the United States.⁷⁵

Southern anxiety about Haiti was real. The senator did not simply worry about

⁷⁴ Montague, *Haiti and the United States*, 52-53.

⁷⁵ *Register of Debates in Congress*, 19 Cong. 1 sess., 330.

symbolic equality being granted to the black republic undermining slavery. He also believed agents from Haiti would actively attack American slavery once the nation had the ability to send foreign consuls on diplomatic trips to the United States. He argued that the South “will not permit black Consuls and Ambassadors to establish themselves in our cities, and to parade through our country, and give their fellow blacks in the United States proof in hand of the honors which await them, for a like successful effort on their part.” The Missourian considered all blacks, whether American or foreign, free or enslaved, to be allies against the South’s enslaved system of labor despite differences in language or national heritage.⁷⁶

Benton also thought enslaved Americans’ witnessing a black foreign minister from Haiti could lead to the destruction of the South and the death of white slaveholders. He bellowed that slaveholders would “not permit the fact to be seen, and told, that for the murder of their masters and mistresses, they are to find *friends* among the white People of these United States.” The Haitian president had already responded to Senator Benton’s latter concern that the sight of Haitian consuls would spark slave revolts. Jean Pierre Boyer offered to forbid Haitian agents from traveling south of the Potomac and promised to send a minister whose skin color would “not offend the prejudices of the country.” Benton, however, remained unconvinced the South could ever take such a deadly risk.⁷⁷

Senator Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina echoed Benton's concerns. Hayne wanted the American mission to Panama to “plead the cause of the South” and work to

⁷⁶ Ibid; Montague, *Haiti and The United States*, 51-52.

⁷⁷ *Register of Debates in Congress*, 19 Cong. 1 sess., 330.

slow the revolutionary spirit of South America he perceived as a threat to southern, white hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. He hoped that the American mission might convince the South American countries to reject Haiti as an equal member of the countries in the Western Hemisphere. He summed up the proslavery stance on Haiti more succinctly than his colleague from Missouri: “Our policy, with regard to Hayti, is plain. We never can acknowledge independence....the peace and safety of a large portion of our Union forbid us even to discuss. Let our government direct all our ministers in South America and Mexico to protest against the independence of Hayti.” The proslavery forces in the federal government would do everything they could to stop a country of blacks from gaining recognition on equal footing with the United States. In the end, the proslavery forces of Congress succeeded in undermining the president’s delegation to Panama. No American delegation made it to Panama in time to participate in the conference in any meaningful way.⁷⁸

Realistically, the nation of Haiti had little capability or inclination to attack slavery in the United States. The likelihood of an army of black revolutionaries crossing the Caribbean for the sake of American slaves and executing a successful uprising appears remote at best and absurd at worst. As a symbol, however, the black republic struck a discomfiting chord with the slaveholding class of the South that made them extremely wary of real insurrections occurring on the plantations or in their cities. Free

⁷⁸ *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution, as Recommended by the General Convention at Philadelphia, in 1787, Together with the Journal of the Federal Convention, Luther Martin's Letters, Yates's Minutes, Congressional Opinions, Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of '08-09, and other Illustrations of the Constitution 4 volumes* ed. Jonathan Elliot (Washington: 1836): 485.

and independent former slaves showed American slaveholders—and the rest of the world—that those held in the chains of enslavement had the capability to successfully attack the power of the master class and cause even the richest of plantation societies to collapse in a heap of ashes. It suggested that if given the opportunity, the right environment, and inspiration from successful slave revolts overseas, the enslaved of the South could do the same.

Indeed, their memory of Caribbean counterparts influenced Gabriel in Virginia and Denmark Vesey in South Carolina to organize well-planned slave insurrections. These, along with many smaller instances of rebellion throughout the South, bore a close enough resemblance to the uprisings Americans learned about in the West Indies to give whites in slave states a feeling of uneasiness about their security and uncertainty over the future of slavery in the United States. The anxiety white southerners felt about the blacks they held in slavery gave the proslavery element of the South a tool, which they used to strengthen their power at home while also claiming that the security of the nation rested on the protection of the southern institution by free states in conjunction with the slave states. The demands on the North for proslavery support, however, did not just come from politicians trying to serve their own interests in expanding slavery. It also allowed slaveholders to point to an outside influence in order to explain why some of the slaves they said were loyal and happy in southern slavery plotted ways to attack the slaveholding class.

Many slaveholders believed that the North—along with the emerging lands of the West—offered a safeguard that had been lacking in the West Indies. The overwhelmingly white population in the North offered a buttress to southern security in

the event that an actual American Toussaint rose to free the blacks of the South. Unlike French or English slaveholders in the Caribbean, American planters had the strength of the United States military at its disposal, which did not reside a thousand miles away or across the ocean. During the latter half of the 1820s slaveholders started to see a change in the antislavery movement. Soon, they believed, the South would witness a dangerous world filled with abolitionists who constantly worked to undermine southern slavery just as English and French slaveholders had experienced. The support of northerners remained a vital component of the South's security against the men and women upon whose labor their society relied at the same time that a northern antislavery movement grew in its determination to see the enslaved freed.

Chapter Two

"Fanaticism" and Southern Fears of Insurrection

Slavery is considered a festering sore by the fanatics of the North. They believe that they are responsible before God and the world, for the sin of African slavery, and although it is within our borders, they must use all their means in their power to destroy it in the States.

-Jeremiah Morton's Secessionist Speech, Virginia, February 28, 1861¹

On January 16, 1830, subscribers to the *Southern Recorder* in the capital of Georgia continued their weekly practice of reading news stories from across the nation. One column talked about dinner parties between strangers on steamboats. Another described an estate sale and advertised hogs, cattle corn, kitchen furniture, and enslaved people, attempting to entice potential buyers. At the bottom of the page the editors mentioned a new book. "Webster's Dictionary," the headline read. The newspaper explained "the officers of Yale College, who have examined this work, are said to have recommended it to the students as being superior to any dictionary of our language." Written and verified by Connecticut Yankees, and published in London, the short though positive review by a leading southern newspaper encouraged its purchase. Webster's book seemed to do what he had intended: tie the nation together.²

Webster's dictionary was more than just a new book; he thought of it as a project in nation building. The rise and fall of empires often came to the forefront of American thought throughout the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Noah Webster

¹ *Showdown in Virginia: The 1861 Convention and the Fate of the Union*, eds. William W. Freehling and Craig M. Simpson (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010): 3.

² Milledgeville *Southern Recorder*, January 16, 1830.

believed the United States could avoid the pitfalls of empires if the states remained harmonious under a strong federal government and united as a nation. He hoped to build connections between the dispersed people of the United States by nationalizing the English language throughout the country. In talking about his famous spelling book he wrote, "A *national language* is a band of *national union*." A dictionary, his dictionary, he hoped would make the United States a stronger and more unified nation and help Americans understand what they said to each other.³

For some time newspapers across the country had reported the progress of Webster's dictionary. After twenty years of studying different languages, Webster completed his *magnum opus* in 1828. Some newspapers poked fun at Webster for some of the words he included in his masterpiece. More than one newspaper wrote, "Noah Webster introduces into his Dictionary as legitimate, the word *lengthy*. We should like to know whether his reason for so doing are *breadthy* and *strengthy*." Despite the criticism of certain words, Webster's book received extensive accolades. In an examination of Webster's finished project, the *Connecticut Herald* called his work "the most extensive and elaborate work which, in our country, has even been executed by the persevering industry of one man." The reviewer praised the dictionary as a useful tool that would help Americans communicate in a more understandable way. With Webster's new tome Americans could speak with each other more clearly.⁴

³ Noah Webster, "Dissertations on the English Language: with Notes, Historical and Critical," in Evan Kornfeld, ed., *Creating An American Culture, 1775-1800: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford Publishing, 2001): 106; V. P. Bynack, "Noah Webster's Linguistic Thought and the Idea of an American National Culture," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 45 (Jan-March, 1984): 99-114; Harlow Giles Unger, *Noah Webster: The Life and Times of an American Patriot* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998): 265-303.

⁴ *The Newport Mercury* January 3, 1829; *Jamestown, New York Journal* January 14, 1829; *The Portsmouth*

As the discourse over slavery began to rise in volume during the 1830s, Webster's dictionary would prove useful in defining the language of the debate. Of all the words used by southerners to describe abolitionists, one word stood out among the rhetoric: "fanaticism n. Excessive enthusiasm; wild and extravagant notions of religion; religious frenzy." Though Webster meant the definition to be related specifically to religious fervor, southerners broadened the word's usage. Abolitionists, many slaveholders warned the rest of the nation, were people so blinded by their faith in black freedom that they risked total destruction of whites to achieve it. Their singular focus made them deranged.⁵

When Georgians picked up the *Southern Recorder* and read about Webster's new dictionary, they also saw a column describing new laws against abolitionism that had been recently enacted. The new laws had one purpose, to prevent any black person living in Georgia from reading a pamphlet that had been sent from the North. Some slaveholders feared what could happen if the incendiary pamphlet—written by one of those antislavery "fanatics" to spark black protest—reached the wrong hands. The abolitionist message needed to be censored.⁶

The first effort to do so involved the mail. Between 1821 and 1831 the size and scope of the American postal system had doubled. In 1830 nearly thirty million letters and newspapers went through the United States postal service that had almost doubled the size of Great Britain's and had five times as many post offices as France. The mail

Journal and Rockingham Gazette April 11, 1829; *Connecticut Herald* February 3, 1829.

⁵ Noah Webster, *The American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1970).

⁶ Milledgeville *Southern Recorder*, January 16, 1830.

delivery system of America allowed anyone willing to pay an easy means to transmit their beliefs across the nation with pointed accuracy. David Walker—a free black man who attended church with Denmark Vesey—understood the postal system's value in spreading ideas to the enslaved of the South. Restrictions might be placed on ships that arrived in southern ports, but Walker vowed to circulate the pamphlet at his own expense. He used the post office, along with sailors heading down the coast, like artillery to launch attacks against American slavery from a safe distance in Boston where he had settled after leaving the South. Some slaveholders worried that Walker, a dealer in used clothing, might be a black Thomas Paine encouraging his compatriots to continue to fight. By the end of 1830, southern authorities found Walker's message appearing throughout their region. They vowed to stop it.⁷

In mid-December 1829 Thomas Lewis, a free black man living in Richmond, opened a parcel that came with a clear return address: 42 Brattle Street, Boston, Massachusetts. Along with thirty copies of a pamphlet entitled *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* was a letter signed "Yours Very Affectionately, David Walker." The Massachusetts abolitionist asked Lewis to sell each copy "among the Coloured people" of Richmond. Each "book" cost twelve cents; however, the author insisted, "if there are any who, cannot pay for *Book* give them *Books* for nothing." For this abolitionist, his message superseded his want of profit.⁸

⁷ Salem Gazette, March 9, 1830; Richard R. John, *Spreading The News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995): 3-6; Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997): 22-62.

⁸ David Walker to Thomas Lewis, December 8, 1829 in Peter P. Hinks, ed., *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

Walker did not stop with just trying to infiltrate Virginia. Walker's *Appeal* soon appeared in Georgia. The only thing needed to penetrate southern defenses of slavery was an address and postage. By the end of December an unsolicited package arrived at the doorstep of Henry Cunningham, the preacher of the African Baptist Church in Savannah. Upon examining the pamphlets, the minister alerted Georgian authorities, most likely fearful that doing anything else could make him, and his parish, the target of a slaveholding power leery of insurrection. What the Georgia leaders read frightened them.⁹

David Walker did not hope to influence those in slavery to organize for just a local slavery rebellion—like Gabriel or Vesey. The black abolitionist wanted—demanded—something bigger. In his pamphlet, composed of four individual articles, he addressed "the coloured citizens of the world." From Africa to Haiti, and Virginia to Brazil, the abolitionist called for the massive uprising of blacks, free or enslaved, against whites in the American South. Walker held disdain for any black person who did not aspire for a better life, whether free and discriminated against in the North or enslaved in the South. Like Thomas Jefferson, whom he lambasted for giving credence to the belief in the inferiority of Africans, Walker saw two nations divided by race residing in America and filled with antipathy towards each other. For the blacks of the United States to be free, they needed to claim freedom themselves instead of relying on the sympathy

⁹ Document IV: Walker's *Appeal* Arrives in Georgia, published in Hinks, *David Walker's Appeal*; Hasan Crockett, "The Incendiary Pamphlet: David Walker's Appeal in Georgia," *The Journal of Negro History* vol. 86 (Summer 2001): 305-318.

of whites.¹⁰

David Walker understood that whites would read his words. *An Appeal* read as a jeremiad against white America—North and South—and challenged its Christianity. Like the Haitians, the rebels of Demerara, and even Denmark Vesey, David Walker linked Christianity and God as the progenitor of natural rights to all of humanity as a way to boost the morale of possible insurrectionists. However, he took it one step further. Walker argued that God heard the cries of the enslaved of the South. Whites would feel the wrath of an angry of the Lord for not allowing the enslaved to read the Bible. For Walker, the enslaved in America fit into the history of other oppressed Christians by "heathen nations." Walker pleaded with blacks to "fear not the number and education of our *enemies*, against whom we shall have to contend for our lawful right; guaranteed to us by our Maker; for why should we be afraid, when God is, and will continue...to be on our side." In a battle between enslaved blacks and white Americans, the Almighty would be on the side of the meek and poor.¹¹

Walker wanted what Gabriel had wanted—war. He prophesied, "the Lord our God, as true as he sits on his throne in heaven, and as true as our Savior died to redeem the world, will give you a Hannibal," the most famous African general in ancient history who had climbed the Alps against all odds in order to attack Rome. Black unity would be needed for this new general to vanquish the white slaveholder, and Walker implored

¹⁰ Hinks, ed., *David Walker's Appeal*, xxvi-xxix, 17-18; Peter S. Onuf, " 'To Declare Them a Free and Independent People': Race, Slavery, and National Identity in Jefferson's Thought," *Journal of the Early Republic* vol 18 (Spring, 1998): 1-7; Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 237-258.

¹¹ Hinks, ed., *David Walker's Appeal*, 2-8, quote on 14; Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 30-31; Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 99-101. Located in modern day Guyana, Demerara was a British colony in the West Indies that experienced a massive insurrection in 1823. For details, especially on the use of religion and conceptions of enslaved rights, see Emila Vieotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

blacks everywhere to quash divisions among them. He pointed to the history of discord between Haiti's enslaved and free blacks, telling his black readers to "read the history particularly of Hayti, and see how they were butchered by the whites, and do take warning." Walker continued, "the person whom God shall give you, give him your support and let him go his length, and behold in him the salvation of your God. God will indeed, deliver you through him from your deplorable and wretched condition." A modern-day Moses would arrive, the black abolitionist promised, and lead his people to freedom.¹²

A final point that Walker made in his *Appeal* differentiated between the southern slaveholder and the British Empire. He wrote, "The English are the best friends the coloured people have upon earth. Though they have oppressed us a little and have colonies now in the West Indies, which oppress us *sorely*....they (the English) have done one hundred times more for the melioration of our condition, than all other nations of the earth put together." Walker most likely separated the Caribbean slaveholders from the British mainland in order to portray the connection between the American and British antislavery movement and to show southern slaveholders who read his pamphlet that blacks had the sympathies of one of the strongest nations in the world.¹³

Upon discovery of the pamphlet in their states, southern leaders responded quickly to prevent further circulation. Both the governor of Virginia, William Giles, and mayor of Savannah, Georgia, William T. Williams, turned to the person they believed would be the best ally to slaveholders in stopping the spread of *An Appeal to the*

¹² Hinks, ed., *David Walker's Appeal*, 22.

¹³ Ibid., 43; Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2008): 96-108.

Coloured Citizens of the World—Harrison Gray Otis, the mayor of Boston. Both southern politicians asked that the mayor prevent the pamphlet from leaving Massachusetts. They also demanded that punishment be handed out to its black antislavery author even though he lived outside of their jurisdiction. Giles and Williams believed an example must be made out of David Walker.¹⁴

Governor Giles and Mayor Williams could not have hoped for a more acquiescent mayor in Boston to try and silence David Walker. Harrison Gray Otis had served as a politician for a long time, first as a congressman elected in 1797, then as a senator from Massachusetts for a term in the 1810s, and, finally, the Federalist stalwart became mayor of Boston in 1829. As a congressman, Harrison Otis had supported the extension of slavery in the Southwest Territory and allied himself with southerners who condemned antislavery petitions sent to the first congresses at the turn of the nineteenth century. As a senator, Otis had opposed admitting Missouri as a slave state, but not because of any moral qualms over slavery; instead, he claimed he voted with the North because of political reasons. The New England Federalist had a distaste for the political power espoused by Virginians. As the antislavery movement of Massachusetts became more radicalized during the 1830s, however, Boston's mayor urged attacks on slavery to be toned down. Surely, the two southerners believed, Walker's pamphlet had crossed a line.¹⁵

Two months later, the letters that both Mayor Williams and Governor Giles

¹⁴ Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis: Federalist, 1765-1848* vol. II (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913): 257; Eaton, "A Dangerous Pamphlet In the Old South," Clement Eaton, "A Dangerous Pamphlet in the Old South," *The Journal of Southern History* 2 (August, 1936): 327.

¹⁵ Morison, *The Life and Letter of Harrison Gray Otis*, 219-230, 274.

received from Otis must have disappointed them. The *Richmond Enquirer* published Otis's response. In his letter to Governor Giles, the mayor wrote that southerners "cannot hold in more absolute detestation, the sentiments of [Walker] than do the people of" Boston and New England. He continued that the *Appeal's* "sanguinary fanaticism" tended to "disgust all persons of common humanity." He even asserted, falsely, that the free black population of the city regretted that the pamphlet—now referred to as "seditious" by many northern as well as southern newspapers—had been published in Boston.¹⁶

The letter Otis wrote to Mayor Williams was also filled with regret. Otis told the Savannah mayor that after receiving a copy of the pamphlet from one of the Board of Alderman, he "perused it carefully, in order to ascertain whether the writer had made himself amenable to our laws." Unfortunately for slaveholders who wanted to see Walker published and the circulation of his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* stopped, Harrison Otis stated that "notwithstanding the extremely bad and inflammatory tendency of the publication," the abolitionist had not committed any crime. Despite having support from anti-abolition forces in Boston, nothing could be done to make Walker stop what he planned to do. Otis explained that he could do no more than chastise Boston's "fanatical" dealer of old clothes.¹⁷

When the Boston mayor ordered an investigation into what Walker was doing, he was told that Walker "openly avows the sentiments of the book and authorship" and that

¹⁶ Harrison B. Otis to William B. Giles February 16, 1830 printed in *Richmond Enquirer* February 18, 1830.

¹⁷ Harrison Gray Otis to William T. Williams, February 10, 1830 published in *Richmond Enquirer* February 18, 1830.

he "declares his intention....to circulate his pamphlets through the mail" if he could not find any other way for his writing to reach a southern readership. The only legal action that the city leader could take, Otis wrote Williams and Giles, was "to publish a general caution to Captains and others, against exposing themselves to the consequences of transporting incendiary writing into your and other Southern States." He would not act directly to censor against Walker's individual right to free speech.¹⁸

White Bostonians applauded their mayor for distancing their city from Walker's *Appeal*. One newspaper praised Otis because he "exculpated the citizens of Boston from any suspicion of participating in the incendiary attempt." The *Boston Courier* took things even further. It stated that, "curiosity induced us, a few days since, to seek out the vender of these 'seditious pamphlets,' and to purchase an article that had created so much excitement among our southern neighbors." The *Courier* continued, however, "The thing is inflammatory enough, in all conscience; but he who believes it to have been written by David Walker, the dealer in old clothes in Brattle street, must have more abundant faith than falls to our humble share."

The evidence against Walker's authorship was simple, they contended. "There are too many allusions to names and incidents in ancient and classical history scattered through the pamphlet....It has the appearances of being the work of an educated and well-read writer, endeavoring to conceal his real character." The newspaper concluded that *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* had not even been printed in Boston, and instead they blamed New York. Walker, they insisted, just claimed authorship in order to "pocket a pretty handsome sum by the sale." The newspaper editor wanted southerners to

¹⁸ Ibid.

know that some Bostonians had similar skepticism of Walker's pamphlet. Northern sympathy was different than northern action. Slaveholders, it seemed, would have to take much of their action against Walker's pamphlet on their own, just as they had done while they waited for a response from New England.¹⁹

An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World came to the South at a time when many slaveholders felt anxious about slave insurrections. During the previous summer, reports of slave uprisings had caused alarm among the white populace in both Virginia and Georgia. In July 1829 a Virginia militia commander informed the governor of an investigation of a possible insurrection and told him that "should this alarm be well founded, we are in a helpless situation for a want of arms." Some slaveholders felt unprepared for another uprising. Walker's pamphlet would exacerbate this sense of unpreparedness.²⁰

Georgians too believed their slave system was already susceptible to a revolt. James Stuart, an Englishman traveling across the United States in 1830, reported that a suspicious fire in Augusta, Georgia, was widely believed to have been started by "incendiaries among the people of colour" the summer before. "One slave a female," he wrote, "was convicted, executed, dissected, and exposed, but she died denying the crime. Another, now with child, is sentenced to be executed in June, but she still denies her guilt. I fear these unhappy creatures are convicted on what we should consider very insufficient evidence." The fire destroyed much of Augusta's supply of weapons for its

¹⁹ Haverhill, Ma. *Gazette*, March 6, 1830; Boston *Courier*, March 22, 1830; Greenville *Mountaineer*, April 30, 1830.

²⁰ H. W. Flournoy, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts from January 1, 1808, to December 31, 1835* vol. 10 (Richmond, 1892): 567-569.

militia. In response, the governor asked the United States Secretary of War for more weaponry from the federal arsenal, thus assuming the nation's assistance in defending against insurrection. Risk needed to be averted. The repression instituted by distressed southern slaveholders that Stuart witnessed in light of the discovery of Walker's pamphlet would eventually shock the sensibilities of the Englishman.²¹

The slaveholding authorities of Georgia did not wait to hear back from Harrison Gray Otis before acting against *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* in their own state. Upon the initial discovery of the pamphlet, the Georgia legislature enacted harsh laws deemed essential to the safety of the white population. By the middle of January 1830, Georgia lawmakers had emulated South Carolina after the Vesey scare and banned free black sailors from leaving port and mingling with the population. The law also imprisoned any black sailor for communicating with "any person of color residing in this State." The law, however, did not intend to create a white and non-white divide. The law explicitly stated that "this act shall not be construed to extend to any free American Indian, free Moors, Lascars, or other colored subjects of the countries beyond the Cape of Good Hope." Georgia lawmakers saw only Atlantic World blacks—the group to whom Walker addressed his pamphlet—as a threat. They also revived a law passed in 1817 that prohibited the importation of slaves to their state, except for "certain conditions." These restrictions were only the beginning.²²

The Georgia state legislature took Walker's pamphlet head on. Legislators

²¹ James Stuart, *Three Years in North America vol. II* (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell and Whittaker and Co, 1831): 123; Clement Eaton, "A Dangerous Pamphlet in the Old South," 323-334; Crocket, "The Incendiary Pamphlet," 309.

²² Milledgeville *Southern Recorder*, January 16, 1830.

enacted a law that punished with death anyone who circulated or assisted in circulation "any printed or written pamphlet, paper or circular, for the purposes of exciting to insurrection, conspiracy or resistance among the slaves, negroes, or free persons of color." Furthermore, the lawmakers prohibited blacks—both free and enslaved—from being taught how to read, sanctioning a fine of up to 500 dollars for whites or "whipping at the discretion of the court" for blacks who taught "any other slave, negro or free person of color, to read or write either written or printed characters." Only in the total suppression of Walker's *Appeal* could white Georgians feel secure. A pamphlet from Boston seemed as threatening as a slave conspiracy and had caused a clamping down in Georgia society similar to the way Vesey's assumed plot had in South Carolina.²³

The repression enacted by the Georgia government shocked James Stuart. In *Three Years in North America* the Englishman explicitly mentioned Georgia's newly enacted statutes. He wrote, "The laws on the subject of slavery in the State of Georgia are as tyrannical as in any of the states." Earlier in his journal the Englishman had noted the stark difference between free states and slave states in the America. He wrote: "The regulations in the different states as to the liberty of the press are as different as those respecting slavery. This liberty can hardly be said to exist in Louisiana, or Georgia, while in most of the northern states it is enjoyed, almost, I may say, without control." For an outsider, the sectional differences between the North and South seemed stark.²⁴

Some northerners, however, viewed the laws differently than did the Englishman. On the same day that the *Southern Recorder* documented the new restrictions on life in

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Stuart, *Three Years in North America*, I, 230, II, 129-130.

Georgia, the *Columbia Centinel* from Massachusetts wrote, "This act appears at first blush violent and sanguinary." However, the newspaper argued, "it appears necessary to the immediate safety of whites. We have seen the pamphlet, which is doubtless here alluded to and do not hesitate to pronounce it one of the most wicked and inflammatory productions that ever issued from the press." The *Centinel* decried the violence Walker called for and justified the harsh regulations as protecting the safety of the white population.²⁵

No doubt harkening back to Bryan Edwards's writings about the cause of slave insurrections during the Haitian Revolution, the pamphlet seemed so dangerous to some Georgian leaders that the mayor of Savannah asked the governor to contact John Forsyth, one of Georgia's senators, in order to enquire about a way for the federal government to suppress Walker's free speech. Mayor Williams asked Governor Gilmer to send the senator a copy of the pamphlet with instructions on how to best serve the state in their time of need. However, Gilmer opposed any action against Walker coming out of Washington because it could empower the federal government to attack slavery and corrode state rights under the Constitution. In his response to the mayor, the Georgia governor explained that the threat of congressional engagement with slavery presented a greater danger to slavery than any single incendiary pamphlet. The federal government would remain a key ally against slave insurrection and could be called upon to supply weapons lost when an uprising burned a militia armory, but it could not be counted on to

²⁵ *Columbian Centinel*, January 16, 1830.

silence David Walker.²⁶

Neither Georgia's new laws nor any intimidation from proslavery forces constrained Walker from distributing more copies of his pamphlet. Even after passing harsher regulations, state authorities found two missionaries to the Cherokees in possession of Walker's *Appeal*. Furthermore, a printer in the state capital, Elijah Burritt, made the mistake of being curious about the pamphlet that had caused such uproar in the legislature. He asked Walker to send him one printing of the pamphlet so that he could read what caused the fuss. Walker sent him twenty-five. When his business partner found a letter from David Walker and the copies of the pamphlet, the printer had to flee for his life, eventually leaving the South and settling in Connecticut because he could not clear his name in the state of Georgia.²⁷

By March 1830 South Carolina newspapers had started discussing Walker's *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. In its analysis of the letter that Harrison Gray Otis had sent to Virginia and Georgia, the *Charleston City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser* talked about the "fanatic insolence" of Walker's *Appeal*. The paper's editors also reported that attempts had been made to distribute the pamphlet in their own city and asked, "Will these wretches never be quiet? Have they no apprehensions that they may be destroyed in the very flames they are laboring to enkindle." Northerners, it seemed at least to some South Carolinians, had become too blinded by their hate of slavery to understand the trouble caused by abolitionist fanatics allowed to continue their

²⁶ Crockett, "The Incendiary Pamphlet," 312-313.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 313-316.

attacks on the southern labor system.²⁸

On March 27, three weeks after the *City Gazette and Commercial Daily* had analyzed Walker's pamphlet, the *Appeal* appeared in the state with the densest slave population. Charleston police arrested a white sailor from Boston, Edward Smith, for carrying the pamphlet into South Carolina and disseminating it to blacks in the city. In his deposition, Smith claimed ignorance of what the writing said. He only knew that he had been tasked to deliver to "any negroes he had a mind to, or that he met" and "did not know that he was doing wrong or violating the law." South Carolina authorities acted quickly to punish the northern sailor.²⁹

The Attorney General of South Carolina swiftly investigated Edward Smith and accused the sailor of libel as well as "maliciously contriving and intending to disturb the peace and security of this State and to move a sedition among the Slaves of the people of this state with force and arms at Charleston in the District of Charleston." The indictment from the grand jury used to prosecute the Boston sailor read like a laundry list from a slaveholder's nightmare. As evidence against Smith, the court took different passages from Walker's *Appeal* specifically mentioning his call to remember the Haitian Revolution and his attacks on white Christianity. In just six days Edward Smith was tried and found guilty. He, however, escaped execution. The court ordered him to pay a \$1,000 fine and spend a year in prison. South Carolina slaveholders in charge of the state wanted to show others that northern interference in their institution of slavery would not be tolerated, but they did not want to spark further outrage from white allies in the North

²⁸ Charleston *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser* March 3, 1830

²⁹ William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, "Walker's Appeal Comes to Charleston: A Note and Documents," *The Journal of Negro History* vol. 59 3 (July 1974): 287-292

by overreacting.³⁰

A few months later the *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser* would claim that Walker's pamphlet had "recoiled upon those with whom it originated" in a report of a riot between "the *brownies* and a few of the philanthropists, in which the latter have been seriously battered and bruised." The newspaper concluded by telling northerners, "They will discover in time, that mischief, like chickens, 'comes home to roost.' " The message was clear: the North needed to continue its devotion to protecting slavery from those who attacked it or face the consequences that stemmed from its destruction. Between March and October 1830, however, Walker's pamphlet would appear throughout much of the South.³¹

In August, Walker's pamphlet finally showed up in North Carolina. Jacob Cowan, an enslaved man who had been given permission to run a tavern, acted as the main agent for distributing *An Appeal to the Coloured Persons of the World* across the state in which David Walker had been born. Cowan received as many as two hundred copies, arriving through the port of Wilmington, to distribute to the local black population who came to his establishment to drink. Upon the discovery of the pamphlets, the Wilmington Magistrate of Police James F. McKee reassured Governor John Owen that "every means which the existing laws of our State" provided had been "promptly used to prevent dissemination." McKee warned the governor that a "systematic" attempt "to sow sedition among the slaves at the South" had obviously been launched "by some reckless personas at the North" and asked that North Carolina follow the lead of its sister

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Charleston *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser* October 2, 1830.

slave states in implementing stronger laws against the black population. Owen agreed. He called a secret meeting of the legislature where lawmakers passed restrictions against teaching slaves how to read and designated punishment for disbursing any kind of writing that might lead to a slave conspiracy, a move that drew criticism from some religious members of the white population in North Carolina.³²

The appearance of Walker's pamphlet also caused uproar in Louisiana. State authorities arrested Milo Mower, a French immigrant and the editor of the antislavery newspaper *The Liberalist*. As a way to justify his imprisonment, the abolitionist was accused of breaking a new law against distributing any writing that might disturb the black population or "excite insubordination among the slaves therein." Walker's *Appeal* gave proslavery forces a way to get rid of an advocate of antislavery in the Deep South. Authorities charged him with distributing a "seditious circular to the free people of color at New Orleans." After his arrest Mower did not appear in the public forum again. Fellow abolitionist editors in the North speculated that he had been deported to Europe. Much of the antislavery movement in the Deep South had been shut down. Slaveholders would control the narrative of the media in the slave states.³³

Despite Louisiana's long history of affording free blacks a place in their society, lawmakers passed new restrictions on that population of roughly seventeen thousand. The state legislature forbade the entrance of any new free black immigrants to the state and

³² Document VIII: Walker's *Appeal* Alarms North Carolina, 1830 in Hinks, *David Walker's Appeal*, 104-106; James Mckee to The Police of Mobile, November 3, 1831 Alabama Department of History and Archives; Eaton, "A Dangerous Pamphlet in the Old South, 331-334.

³³ *The New York Morning Herald* September 10, 1830; *Boston Courier* September 16, 1830; Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004): 91-95.

threatened to deport recent black arrivals. The legislature also passed its own version of the Negro Seaman's Act, prohibiting black sailors from staying in the port of New Orleans for more than thirty days. In reaction to the new laws, some free blacks considered leaving for the West Indies as others pleaded with them to stay and "hope for better times."³⁴

Laws passed in the South to regulate or bar free blacks from moving into slave states raised the ire of some northerners. Like southerners who viewed free blacks as a threat, many in the North did not want to live near a black population. These northerners feared that banning free blacks in southern states would force them to move to the North. Though many free states had long ago proscribed slavery, much of the northern white population shared an anti-black sentiment that transcended sectional lines. Some of the animus towards slavery in the North stemmed from the desire to have nothing to do with blacks.

Southern newspapers mocked northerners, whom they blamed for their need to pass harsher laws. For instance, the Milledgeville *Southern Recorder*, reporting on an article from the New York *Journal of Commerce* that worried about the burden of free blacks moving northward, wrote, "The Free person of color are a burden in the Northern States! They are not willing to receive more of this kind of population! What a confession! especially the Southern State for possessing a greater number than they do." The South, the newspaper claimed, needed to pass laws like those passed in Louisiana in

³⁴ Boston *Weekly Messenger* April 8, 1830; *The Pittsfield Sun* May 27, 1830; *Laws of Louisiana*, 9th Legislature, 2nd session, 90-94; Benjamin Lundy and Thomas Earl, *The Life, Travels, and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy Including His Journeys to Texas and Mexico, with a Sketch of Contemporary Events, and a Notice of the Revolution of Hayti* (Philadelphia: William D. Parrish, 1847): 241; Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 334-335.

order to maintain its safety. They mocked northerners: "The *humane* in the North, and the *truly philanthropist* will have in their power to convince, that their repeated professions of virtue, disinterested humanity for the poor degraded Africans are not empty declarations." The article ended with a declaration that southerners realized that having a large black population was a problem and asked why northerners would not spend their money to buy slaves and send them to Africa. If abolitionists wanted to free the slaves, some southerners argued, they should be willing to accept the consequences of their fanatical ways. The black population of the nation, for both some northerners and southerners, created a problem that had no easy solution, as the white population in neither section of the country wanted to welcome freed slaves into the places where they lived.³⁵

Lawmakers in Virginia, like their neighbors to the south, had also tried to pass new regulations of their black population but had been denied. Governor Giles had called a secret session of the legislature in order to enact harsh restrictions on blacks living in their state, including a prohibition on teaching the enslaved how to read. However, while the proposed law passed the House of Delegates, it failed in the Senate when the bill's opponents thought them to be too harsh. Unlike much of the Deep South, the Old Dominion did not see a rash of new laws upon the discovery of Walker's *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*.³⁶

During the early part of 1830, newspapers in Virginia mocked the secrecy of the governor and criticized his fear of the black population. The *Richmond Whig* was quoted

³⁵ Milledgeville *Southern Recorder*, June 12, 1830.

³⁶ Eaton, "A Dangerous Pamphlet in the Old South," 329-331;

in newspapers in both slave and free states as saying "one would really suppose that Governor Giles imagined he was sleeping over a mine of gunpowder and that he dreamt of nothing but conspiracies and servile war." Many in the South wondered: What could one abolitionist do? One man in Boston could not undermine southern security. The scare caused by David Walker and his pamphlet seemed, to these skeptics, overblown and politically motivated to help the governor gain higher approval.³⁷

In the summer of 1831, seventy miles away from Richmond in remote Southampton Country, Virginia, Nat Turner—an enslaved evangelical preacher—launched a violent attack against those who kept him and his brethren in bondage. After Turner's insurrection, what had been known to very few as a backwater region near the Dismal Swamp became nationally infamous as the stage of one of America's bloodiest attacks against slaveholders before the Civil War. By the end of 1831, Virginians would have experienced a shock to their slave system that made many whites living there to reconsider their stance against the abolition of slavery and removing blacks from their state.

Turner's formulation of an insurrection started in 1825 when the preacher claimed to have seen a vision from God. Like Moses' experience with the burning bush, Turner told his captors following the rebellion that "the Spirit that spoke to the prophets" had shown itself to the enslaved preacher who "for two years prayed continually" until he "had the same revelation, which fully confirmed me in the impression that I was ordained for some great purpose." For over five years Turner said he saw visions from heaven.

³⁷ The *Richmond Whig* was quoted in the *Baltimore Patriot* January 13, 1830 and *Norwich Courier* January 27, 1830.

Finally, on August 13, 1831, he saw his last one. The sun seemed to change colors in the sky. The time to strike seemed certain.³⁸

Though it is unclear if Nat Turner had come into contact with *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, David Walker's prophecy seemed to come to realization. Turner recruited lieutenants and other foot soldiers. Strengthened by the belief that God would protect him as an instrument of the Lord and fully aware of what happened to Denmark Vesey just a decade before, the group of insurrectionists prepared for battle. Like Gabriel Prosser, Turner's followers called him "General Nat." They "armed and equipped" themselves "and gathered sufficient force, neither age nor sex was to be spared." Their goal revolved around one thing, vengeance.³⁹

Judgment Day, as the Turner historian Stephen B. Oates has called it, started on the second-to-last Sunday of August 1831. Like Gabriel, Nat Turner's plan started with the death of his own master's family, Joseph Travis. In the middle of the night, the band of the enslaved insurrectionists walked up to the Travis cabin carrying axes. Turner broke into the locked house through the roof, unlocking the door for his compatriots. Sneaking into the house quietly in order to not awaken the neighborhood, Nat Turner

³⁸ Thomas R. Gray, *The Confessions of Nat Turner, The Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, VA* (Baltimore: Luca and Deaver, 1831) in Henry Irving Tragle, ed. *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A compilation of Source Material* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1971): 308-311.

³⁹ *Verbatim Record of the Trials in the Court of Oyer and Terminer of Southampton County* in Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt*, 202-203; See also Stephen B. Oates, *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion* (New York: Perennial, 1975): 35-57.

observed that he "must spill first blood." The time to strike out against the master class finally came to hand.⁴⁰

Armed with a small hatchet, the rebel leader struck the man who held him in bondage, but the blow only glanced off Travis's head, awaking him. As he screamed for his wife while springing from his bed, he met his fate. One of Turner's compatriots "laid him dead, with a blow of his axe." Sally Travis, along with two others met the same end, hacked to pieces with an axe. After leaving the cabin and walking "some distance," the insurrectionists remembered that the Travises also had "a baby in a cradle" and returned to kill the child. The deed had been done. The Travis family had been wiped out and the battle had been started. A new general had taken command to attack slavery from the inside.⁴¹

After killing the Travises, the group found muskets in a barn to aid their attack. It was there that Turner was transformed from a preacher to a general. In his account of the uprising, he said "I formed them in a line as soldiers, and after carrying them through all the manoeuvres [sic] I was master of, marched them off to Mr. Salathul Francis'." Throughout the night Turner and his new army went door to door—first to the Francis house, then Mrs. Reese's, then Mrs. Turner's, then Mrs. Whitehead, and finally Mr. Bryant's. The rebels split up into groups to be more effective at their task. Most of those who died were killed with axe blows to the head, some struck to the ground with a blunt sword, beveled by the rebels, before coming to a bloody, violent end. In at least one case,

⁴⁰ Gray, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* in Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt*, 311. Oates gives a descriptive overview of the actual assault in *The Fires of Jubilee*, 61-102.

⁴¹ Gray, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* in Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt*, 311.

Will, a slave who joined Turner and who he called "the executioner," nearly decapitated one of the women he had dragged from a house. The black insurgents aimed at total destruction. No white person could be innocent. Unlike Gabriel, those who tolerated slavery would not be spared from Turner's vengeance.⁴²

As the company of insurrectionists marched forward, they came across a cabin that had been vacated. The Porter family had escaped, the alarm to others sounded. Turner's group prepared for combat as they saw a group of eighteen white men preparing their counterattack. "Immediately on discovering the whites," Turner recalled, "I ordered my men to halt and form." The slave general readied his men for battle. They soon skirmished, but after realizing that more white men had joined the scene as reinforcements and seeing that some of his men had been wounded, Turner's battalion retreated, leaving none of their men on the field. They followed the preacher-turned-general as he sought to go to Jerusalem, one of the larger towns of Southampton County.⁴³

However, Turner's militia had been dispersed, and he tried "in vain to collect a sufficient force to proceed." He determined to instead head back to their old neighborhood, where his dispersed soldiers would rejoin him, find new recruits, and launch another attack. After failing to rally his troops and finding "no more victims to gratify our thirst for blood" during the retreat, Turner was forced to hide in a cave located in a woods near the Travis homestead. By Thursday the rebellion had been quelled.

⁴² Ibid., 312.

⁴³ Ibid., 313-314.

Three thousand white soldiers came to Southampton from throughout Virginia to assist the county's slaveholders. Virginia defenses had been bolstered by the United States Army and Navy. The South's allies had arrived. For six weeks the white population of the small Virginian community doggedly searched for the black preacher/general before capturing the rebel leader, bringing him to trial, and executing him.⁴⁴

Newspapers reported the incident with an almost hysterical tone of astonishment at the events that had transpired in Southampton. One exclaimed, "What an abandoned set of banditti these cut-throats are! Their steps are everywhere marked with the blood of women and children: An astonishing fatality seems to have attended these helpless classes. Neither infancy nor female sex is spared in their blood-thirsty wrath!" Others seemed to have trouble accepting what had happened in Southampton. *The Richmond Compiler* wrote, "The intelligence was so awful and unexpected, that it was received with much hesitation and doubt by all whom it was communicated, until the afternoon" when a colonel from Suffolk "left no room for conjecture or uncertainty." The governor received a letter that argued Turner had launched his attack too early and asked the governor to prepare for a "concerted" attack in eight days. Virginia seemed to be in chaos. Whites needed to be on guard and prepare to defend their homes.⁴⁵

Reports throughout the state varied on how large Turner's group of slave rebels had been. Some newspapers stated that there were "150 to 400, acting in detached

⁴⁴ Ibid., 315-316; *Norfolk Herald* August 26, 1831 reprinted in *Richmond Enquirer* August 30, 1831; *Norfolk American Beacon* September 3, 1831.

⁴⁵ *Richmond Compiler* August 27, 1831. reprinted in Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt*, 47; N. E. Sutton to John Floyd, Sept 21, 1831, Executive Papers of John Floyd, Library of Virginia.

parties," others reported that there were only "40 to 100 deluded wretches." Turner himself placed his following at between sixty and eighty. Most newspapers tried to calm the public by reporting that white military leaders were prepared to act and that after a few days of white terror, "tranquility [had] been restored." The Norfolk *American Beacon* told its readership that they purposely had been withholding some of the stories they received because they wanted to authenticate their sources as a measure to "counteract the many exaggerated statements with which gossip rumor, with her hundred tongues, has hourly abused the public confidence." Authorities and the media hoped to keep the Virginia populace coolheaded as they tracked the insurrectionist leader.⁴⁶

A reign of violence by whites against blacks, however, followed Turner's uprising. Angry whites tracked down slaves they believed to be part of the insurrection and summarily attacked them. On August 29, the Richmond *Constitutional Whig* reported, "The people are naturally wound up to a high pitch of rage." Five days later the newspaper wrote, "It is with pain we speak of another feature of the Southampton Rebellion; for we have been most unwilling to have our sympathies for the sufferers diminished or affected by their misconduct. We allude to the slaughter of many blacks." Up to forty blacks had been either shot or decapitated in the wave of white fury following the revolt.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Norfolk *American Beacon* August 26, 1831; *The Richmond Compiler* August 24, 1831; Petersburg *Intelligencer*, August 26, 1831 all newspaper articles republished in Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt*, 36-40.

⁴⁷ *The Constitutional Whig* August 29, September 3, 1831 in Tragle, *The Southampton Revolt*, 50-52, 66-72.

"Fanaticism" became one of the charges against the leader of the slave rebellion. Newspapers from Richmond printed the same story explaining to their readers what happened in Southampton: "A fanatic preacher by the name of Nat Turner (Gen. Nat Turner!) who had been taught to read and write and permitted to go about preaching in the country, was at the bottom of this infernal brigandage." In a letter published in the *Richmond Enquirer*, a resident from Southampton County decried Nat Turner's connection to the Baptist church. Instead, he argued, "those fanatical scoundrels" only "pretended to be divinely inspired." The editor of *The Constitutional Whig* argued that the insurrectionists had only been motivated by "fanatical revenge." Infused with the spirit of fanaticism, Virginia experienced another Gabriel—a slave with a little more freedom than most, who became a general in a war against slaveholding. This time, however, white blood had actually been spilled.⁴⁸

The slave uprising in Southampton caused widespread fear throughout the South. One South Carolinian, George Reid, wrote in a letter to his brother that the Turner rebellion had caused rumors to fly around South Carolina. He said that the rebellion had caused South Carolinians to be "wide awake" in their observance of their slaves and that planters were becoming wary of any signs of further disturbances. North Carolinians along with Virginians made numerous requests of their governor for militia officers to be sent to protect panicked white citizens as fear swept through some of the slave states.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Richmond *Compiler* August 29, 1831 reprinted in *Richmond Enquirer* August 30, 1831, September 9, 1831; *The Constitutional Whig* August 29, 1831 in Tragle, *The Southampton Revolt*, 50-53.

⁴⁹ George and Eliza Reid to William Moultrie Reid. Charleston, S.C. October 5, 1831. William Clements Library, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor; Charles Edward Morris, "Panic and Reprisal: Reaction in North Carolina to the Nat Turner Insurrection of 1831" *North Carolina Historical Review* pages 29-52vol.

Turner's rebellion shook the foundations of the southern slave system and allowed the antislavery sentiment to grow in the Old Dominion. Some Virginians saw the white population losing the skills needed to have a vibrant economy. They feared that the "machanick trades and arts are falling fast into the hands of the black population," which drove away white skilled labor and caused the state to become too dependent on its slaves to survive. This concern did not just rise in Virginia; in 1831 Tennessee passed a law that made it obligatory for any freed slave to be removed from the state. North Carolina placed restrictions on the free black community. Slave states, at least of the Upper South, wanted to diminish the size of their black population. Without a market for skilled white labor to keep the free white population in the state stable, slaveholders also lost possible soldiers for the local militias that protected the free population from the enslaved. Nat Turner had made many in the South experience the dangers of slavery as they never had before. Language and water had separated them from Haiti; Gabriel and Vesey had been stopped—but those who died in Southampton had been neighbors, friends, and family.⁵⁰

Laws that had been passed by other slave states after the arrival of Walker's *Appeal* now received reconsideration in the Virginia. The legislature enacted a law that punished "any person" who distributed "any book, pamphlet or other writing, advising, or inciting persons of colour...to make insurrection, or to rebel" with "death, without the benefit of clergy." It was the same punishment that Gabriel Prosser received three

LXII (January 1985): 30-33; Governor John Floyd Diary, November 21, 28, 1831 in Tragle, *Southampton Revolt*, 262

⁵⁰ Legislative Petition, Culpepper County, December 9, 1831 in Eric Foner, *Nat Turner* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971): 96-97; William Lloyd Imes, "The Legal Status of Free Negroes and Slaves in Tennessee," *The Journal of Negro History* vol. 4 (July 1919): 260; John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1943): 70-120.

decades prior for preparing an actual insurrection. Lawmakers also placed regulations on the movement of both free and enslaved blacks, the ability of the enslaved to sell goods, regardless of how they obtained them, and prohibited all nonwhites from selling or disbursing alcohol within a mile of "any muster, preaching, or other public assembly." The fear felt by slaveholders in the Deep South that came from *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* had come to the Upper South with Turner's Rebellion.⁵¹

Many southerners felt besieged by those opposed to slavery and worried about an invasion of fanatical abolitionists who wanted to spark enslaved unrest. Turner's insurrection exasperated those fears in Virginia. Following Bryan Edwards's thesis about the cause of the Haitian Revolution, many Virginians blamed the North for instigating the insurrection. A militia leader, Benjamin Cabell, wrote to the governor of Virginia, "The Southampton insurrection was only a branch of a plan, long since laid." He requested arms to protect his village where "the slave population in town and its vicinity bears a great proportion, if it does not equal that of the whites." He connected David Walker to Nat Turner and blamed "the damnable spirit of fanaticism engendered by Northern publications and, perhaps disseminated by missionaries."⁵²

Governor John Floyd, as well as slaveholders from other states, sought out ways to punish northern abolitionists. In South Carolina, the "Vigilance Association of Columbia" offered a reward of \$1,500 for the capture and conviction of "any white person who may be detected in distributing or circulating within the State the newspaper

⁵¹ Draft of a Bill Concerning "Slaves, Free Negroes and Mulattoes," in Tragle, *The Southampton Revolt*, 455-462.

⁵² Benjamin Cabell to John Floyd Sept 20, 1831, Executive Papers of John Floyd, Library of Virginia.

called 'the Liberator'" or any other publication that had a "seditious tendency." Floyd worried that the abolitionists were planning further insurrections in the state and wrote in his diary that if the "fanatics" continued to be unchecked by northern governments, Virginia would "not be tied up by the confederacy from doing ourselves justice." Following Turner's attack against the white population of Virginia, southerners again looked to their white, northern counterparts and demanded that they stem the tide of the antislavery movement.⁵³

In the fall of 1831 a letter from Boston arrived at the post office of Jerusalem, Virginia, that was quickly forwarded to the governor and only exacerbated the frayed nerves of the state's leadership when the governor presented it to the legislature. Speaking with the rage of David Walker, bolstered by the independence of Haiti in the Caribbean, and encouraged by Turner's rampage against the white population, the author—a man named Nero and allegedly a free black once held in slavery in Virginia—claimed that all of Turner's lieutenants had not been caught and that more white blood would be spilled in the South. He wrote that "more than three hundred men of colour...who have pledged ourselves with spartan fidelity" would "avenge the indignities" placed on blacks by "the Slave holding Tyrants." Whereas Walker promised Hannibal, Nero promised that "a modern Leonidas" would lead his outnumbered army to victory against a more powerful slaveholding class, making Virginia the Thermopylae of America. Though some Virginians thought Nero's message to be a hoax, the governor placed the letter in his scrapbook under the label of "Liberator: Genius of Emancipation" and believed it an abolitionist attempt to scare an already shaken South by trying to incite

⁵³ *The Liberator* October 22, 1831; Diary of John Floyd, in Tragle, *The Southampton Revolt*, 251-252.

further slave insurrection. A shaken slaveholding class needed to treat each threat seriously in the aftermath of the insurrection in Southampton.⁵⁴

Nero, however, did not just stop with the promise of launching more slave insurrections. He also explained that a vast conspiracy existed along with a network of communication that stretched from Haiti to the South as well as throughout much of the northern states. Walker's *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* had all been part of a master plan for black revolution, Nero explained. The letter identified Elijah Burritt as one of the plot's agents in the South and stated, "Our holy cause most surely was then in jeopardy" when the printer had been caught by Georgian authorities. However, "had it not been for a most masterly manœuvre [sic] of our Chief...Burritt would have lost his worthless life, and our fond hopes would have been blasted." He told southern readers "we have many a white agent in Florida, S. Carolina, and Georgia." Anyone could be a conspirator.⁵⁵

Nero also claimed that the plot had international connections to an enemy the South feared—Haiti. The letter declared that though "our beloved Chief is a Native of Virginia," he had escaped to Haiti where "his noble soul became warmed by the spirit of freedom, and an unqualified hatred for the oppressors of his race." The only slaves to ever defeat white slaveholders and gain their liberty had taught the black hero how to do it in the United States. Haiti, Nero insisted, would come to the South, if not by directly

⁵⁴ This letter was republished as "After Nat Turner: A Letter From the North." *The Journal of Negro History* 55 (April 1970): 144-151.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

sending soldiers then by indirectly training American blacks in the tactics of winning a race war.⁵⁶

Another frightening aspect of Nero's letter for southern slaveholders was its explanation of how would-be insurrectionists would gather their weapons. He wrote, "We have assurance of arms and ammunition from Non-Slaveholding States—I mean from individuals in those states, and Hayti offers an asylum for those who survive the approaching carnage." The "approaching carnage" would be in the same vein as Turner's. The rebels planned to "spare neither age nor sex." Nero played on the southern stereotype of northerners in order to undermine their trust in the white North. He said, "a Yankee, you know, will hazard his life for money." Wealthy abolitionists who wanted to end southern slavery by any means necessary, he contended, could easily buy off the North's alliance with the South to quell slave unrest, forcing slaveholders to fight the enslaved warriors by themselves.⁵⁷

Nero challenged the North's faithfulness to southern slavery as well as the slaveholders' control of their society. He wrote, "There are more people in Boston, [New] York, Philadelphia and Hartford who know more of the circumstances of the late insurrection than any Slave holder in Virginia or North Carolina." He promised that the United States postal service would again be used as a weapon against American slavery. Following David Walker's lead, Nero assured that "our handbills and placards will soon be found in your streets, and there will be enough to read them; this you cannot prevent—

⁵⁶ Ibid., 146-147.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 147.

the Post Office is free for anyone—anyone has a right to receive communications through the medium of it." He exalted the postal service as "machinery of vast power." In only a few short years following Nero's letter, the slaveholders in the South would see what he meant as abolitionists mailed antislavery tracts to the South trying to convince them to give up slavery.⁵⁸

Just as Gabriel's Rebellion had prompted some in Virginia to question the viability of slavery in the long term, proponents of making the state's population whiter saw Turner's insurrection as an "auspicious moment for action." Some Virginians believed the best remedy for the threat of a slave uprising was to devise "a means by which the blacks may be removed beyond our borders, and by which too, the number of slaves may gradually be diminished." Many Virginians demanded that something be done to ensure the safety of whites from the enslaved. After the insurrection in Southampton, even the elderly James Madison worried about the dangers of holding so many people in slavery and recommended the sale of public lands as a way to pay for the removal of blacks from the Upper South.⁵⁹

Turner's revolt provided the impetus for southern abolitionists to attack slavery and caused proslavery forces to change how they defended the South's labor system. The state had a clear sectional divide between westerners, who had less representation and a very small black population, and easterners, where much of the state's black population lived and large-scale slavery had become a staple of life. While some challenged slavery

⁵⁸ Ibid., 148.

⁵⁹ *Richmond Enquirer* November 15, 1831; James Madison to R. R. Gurley, December 29, 1831 in *The Writings of James Madison* ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1910): 9: 468-470.

on moral grounds, other non-slaveholders of the state argued that Virginia needed to move towards becoming free soil in order to develop an industrial base and a more diverse economy that would offer more opportunity to poor whites. Some slaveholders defended the practice and their labor system as others in the state, on both sides, believed that the best remedy for the divide between slaveholders and free soil advocates would be to split the state into two states. Still others believed that slavery would naturally diminish within the state as planters shifted from growing tobacco to planting wheat and corn. After a heated debate, the Virginia legislature decided to neither defend slavery nor enact a gradual emancipation scheme. Future generations would have to grapple with the issue.⁶⁰

The historian Alison Freehling has argued that much of the conversation Virginians had in the legislature hinged upon the "means, not ends" of removing chattel slavery from the Upper South. Antislavery proponents argued that colonization would have to be coupled with gradual emancipation while proslavery forces argued against the constitutionality of confiscating their property, maintained that colonization was impractical, and insisted that slavery would die a "natural death." The two sides of the debate over continuing slavery in the Old Dominion did agree on one thing—blacks posed a dangerous problem for whites, whether freed or enslaved.⁶¹

The debate over what to do about the black population did not just stay in Virginia. Other slave states—Delaware, Kentucky, Tennessee, Maryland, and North

⁶⁰ For a more in depth analysis of the debate that occurred after Turner's revolt see Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

⁶¹ Ibid. 158-159.

Carolina—debated the role of blacks free and enslaved in their society. Some banned more blacks from entering their states and placed more restrictions on all blacks living in the state. Others allowed the decaying profitability of slavery to force slaveholders to sell their chattel labor southward. As the historian Lacy Ford has written, "For much of the upper South, the practical answer to the slavery question was to let their slaves become the lower South's problem." The debate over slavery in the early 1830s in Virginia forced those most ardently proslavery to shift how they defended the institution. Instead of proclaiming it entirely a necessary evil, proslavery advocates also began to make the case that it provided a positive result for both nonslaveholding whites as well as the enslaved. Slavery became good while black slaves became dangerous without a system of bondage to control them.⁶²

Slavery, according to the most passionate supporters, not only helped raise blacks from barbarism, but also protected nonslaveholding whites from a dangerous enslaved population that could not operate as free people. Following the debates in the Virginia legislature during the aftermath of the Turner revolt, Thomas Roderick Dew, a professor of political law and eventually the president of the College of William and Mary, used his position as an expert and intellectual to write a defense of slavery that became a foundational argument for the proslavery movement in the 1830s and 1840s. First publishing an article in the *American Quarterly Review* entitled "The Abolition of Slavery," Dew later expanded his thoughts into a book called *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832*. Among other topics in the book, Dew talked

⁶² Lacy Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 389. Ford's book discusses the transition in how slaveholders defended slavery during the 1820s and 30s.

about colonization, emancipation, Haiti, England, and insurrections as he tried to defend southern slavery from attacks launched by abolitionists. Written only three years later, but nearly twice as long, Dew's *Review* acted as a proslavery counter to Walker's *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. While one talked about the evils of slavery, the other spoke of good things that came from southern slavery. Each affected how Americans during the Jacksonian period understood slavery and slavery's future.⁶³

Walker told his readers, whom he hoped would be black but knew would at least partially be white, that slavery had made his people "the *most wretched, degraded* and *abject* set of being that *ever live*." Dew told his mostly white audience, "Slavery, we assert again, seems to be the only means that we know of, under Heaven, by which the ferocity of the savage can be conquered, his wandering habits eradicated, his slothfulness and improvidence overcome." The institution of slavery, Dew wrote, had "been perhaps the principal means for impelling forward the civilization of mankind." The professor believed that slavery offered the most progressive way for a civilization to advance through the "three stages in which man has been found to exist," the first being "hunting and fishing"; second, "the pastoral"; and finally, "agricultural." What Walker had called degradation, Dew called civilizing, contending, "Nothing but slavery can civilize such beings, give them habits of industry, and make them cling to life for its enjoyments." For

⁶³ Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981): 21-23. Dew's writing would be praised throughout the South as the perfect example of how to defend slavery. Many southerners lamented the fact that *Review of the Debate in Virginia* did not gain heavy traction in the North because they believed it would sway opinion. See Judge Harper, "Memoir on Slavery," *Southern Literary Messenger* 4 (October 1838): 609-636.

slaveholders defending the practice, slavery was the opposite of what Walker had proclaimed to the world. The enslavement of blacks promoted progress.⁶⁴

Christian morality, just as in *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, also played a central role in Dew's proslavery argument. He contended that the possible course of direction for Americans was not between slavery being sanctioned as morally right or wrong. Instead, *Review of the Debates in Virginia* shifted away from what he believed was the false choice offered by abolitionists. The professor maintained that slavery helped blacks and whites. Dew wrote, "We cannot get rid of slavery without producing a greater injury both to the masters and slaves, there is no rule of conscience or revealed law of God which *can* condemn us." He spoke of a physician not ordering a treatment to a disease if it would only "hasten the fatal issue" and justified the continuance of slavery because removal "would only hasten and heighten the final catastrophe." While Walker expected God to punish the slaveholders for holding blacks in bondage, Dew anticipated commendation from the Almighty. He believed white slaveholders should expect to hear that they had been "good and faithful servants" on the day of their judgment for choosing the higher good when debating an "original sin" that had been foisted up the United States by the British Empire.⁶⁵

England, the nation David Walker called "the best friend" of blacks in the world, became part of the evidence in favor of slavery in *Review of the Debate in the Virginia*

⁶⁴ Thomas R. Dew, *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832* (Richmond: T. W. White, 1832): 11, 32, 44-45; Hinks, ed., *David Walker's Appeal*, 9.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 106-108; Evangelical minister Jeremiah Jeter provides another good example of this line of thinking. He debated freeing his slaves, but like Dew, chose to continue his slaveholding, justifying his actions by claiming the higher good. See John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002): 68-70.

Legislature. Dew asked his readers to look at "the Parliament of Great Britain, [which] with all its philanthropic zeal" had "never yet seriously" thought about ending slavery in the Caribbean. Despite its antislavery movement, England validated slavery in the United States because the empire's inaction in the West Indies allowed proslavery defenders to argue that even the European nation friendliest to the enslaved still believed that ending slavery would be disastrous. To demonstrate what the British in the West Indies believed about slavery, Dew informed his defense of slavery in the 1830s with Bryan Edwards' *History of the West Indies*, enlarging the influence in southern thought of the English historian from Jamaica.

Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature, like Walker's *Appeal*, also mentioned the violence and destruction seen during the Haitian Revolution. Whereas Walker's *Appeal* pointed to Haiti to show how whites had mistreated the enslaved, Dew used the former French colony as a warning to his white readers. He blamed Revolutionary France's "intemperate and phrenetic zeal for liberty and equality" for causing the "the bloodiest and most shocking insurrection ever recorded in the annals of history." That mistake, he maintained, had cost France "the fairest and most valuable of all her colonial possessions." The nation had become "convinced of her madness." The French tried to restore slavery but it had already been lost. Once the enslaved had been freed, they could never be forced back into slavery.

Learning from that grave mistake, he said, "France, Spain, and Portugal, large owners of colonial possessions, have not only not abolished slavery in their colonies, but have not even abolished the slave trade in practice." Professor Dew implied that the United States should follow the other slaveholding nations and preserve slavery in order

to maintain the country's racial stability. Without slavery, Dew prophesied dire consequences for whites, not just slaveholders, but all whites who lived in the United States.⁶⁶

Dew's task in defending slavery hinged on two counterintuitive principles: slaves could be dangerous, but slavery was peaceful and morally right. The professor argued that David Walker's stance that the enslaved wanted to be free or that Nat Turner hated his master proved to be an exception. He wrote that the enslaved of the South "generally loves the master and his family" and express "unfeigned grief at the deaths which occur among the whites." Blacks held in slavery in the United States acted differently from the enslaved of other portions of the New World, *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature* argued. Dew believed that the enslaved of the South had "imbibed the principles, sentiments, and feelings of the whites." He also challenged the idea that the black population would become much larger than the white population as he tried to placate moderates skeptical of his position. American slavery would remain secure as long as southern slaveholders remained in complete control over the slave system of the South. Slavery naturally regulated itself.⁶⁷

However, because blacks loved their masters, Dew contended that slavery helped to maintain racial peace in the South. He wrote, "A negro will rob your *hen roost* or your *stye*, but it is rare indeed that he can ever be induced to murder you." He asked his readers to subscribe to the notion that "in dealing with a negro we must remember that we

⁶⁶ Dew, *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832*, 5-6.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 113-114,, 119-130. Dew wrote a detailed argument about the productivity of slave labor and westward immigration in which he opposed the nascent free-soil ideology being developed in the North. Eventually, he believed, westward immigration from Virginia would ease as more land became occupied

are dealing with a being possessing the form and strength of a man, but the intellect of only a child." Dew wanted his audience to know that there existed a simple notion about blacks living in the South—while southerners looked to their slaves as the source of insecurity, they should be looking to outside forces purposely causing the black population to rebel. Developing a point that came to dominate white thinking in the South, Dew argued that slave rebels had not developed their rage because they wanted to be free. Instead, only "demented fanatics" spurred on by outside forces like David Walker attacked their masters.⁶⁸

Thomas Dew warned white America against supporting any form of antislavery. Whether they believed it or not, all antislavery proponents promoted insurrection in an indirect fashion as much as David Walker's *Appeal* had encouraged an uprising from the black population directly. He wrote, "The great evil, however, of these schemes of emancipation, remains yet to be told. They are admirably calculated to excite plots, murders, and insurrections; whether gradual or rapid in case, you disturb the quiet and contentment of the slave who is left unemancipated." Whites and blacks could not live freely together. In freedom, he stated, a large black population would not know how to take care of themselves: the slaves' "worthlessness and degradation will stimulate him to deeds of rapine and vengeance." Slavery, as only a slaveholder with experience in living with black people could understand, protected the white, nonslaveholding population according to the growing proslavery movement.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 105, 113-114.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 101-102.

Review of the Debates of the Virginia Legislature articulated one of the first justifications for preventing nonslaveholders from talking about or regulating southern slavery. When talking about western Virginians promoting antislavery legislation, Dew wrote, "The fact is, it is always a most delicate and dangerous task for one set of people to legislate for another, without any community of interests." Only slaveholders should be allowed to make rules about slavery. He asked, "If a convention of the whole state of Virginia were called, and in due form the right of slave property were abolished by the votes of Western Virginia alone, does anyone think that Eastern Virginia would be bound to yield the decree?" Over the next decade, slaveholders from across the nation would ask the same the question as the debate over slavery moved from state legislatures to the United States Congress. Only those who held slaves and lived with a large black population understood what could happen if emancipation occurred against the will of the master class.⁷⁰

Thomas Dew urged his readers to understand that all whites would suffer the consequences of freeing the enslaved. The proslavery author wrote, "let [Virginia] liberate her slaves, and every year you would hear of insurrections and plots, and every day would perhaps record a murder." He contextualized the argument by talking about different places where the enslaved had been free. Dew pointed to Guatemala and quoted a passage from Henry Dunn's *Sketches of Guatemala* that spoke of white men and women being forced to constantly arm themselves in order to defend themselves from blacks who sought revenge. He pointed to the Haitian Revolution and the *Amis des Noirs* who he, again following Edwards, said had promoted insurrection in the Caribbean by giving

⁷⁰ Ibid., 67

nonwhites "the same privileges and immunities as whites" and created a "strangely inharmonious" white population that could not rally to squash the black revolt in its infancy. Dew's message was clear: the enslaved blacks of the South in themselves were not dangerous, but if spurred on by people like David Walker or other antislavery leaders, insurrections would spring up and all whites would be called to defend themselves.⁷¹

The power of the fear that an outsider could induce a slave uprising became apparent in 1833 when Virginia's governor received a note from a concerned citizen. The letter talked about a "suspicious charlatan who is endeavoring to cause the slaves to rebel and make insurrection." The stranger arrived with two other men and had with him "a large box supposed from the best evidence I can get to weigh from four to five hundred pounds and thought by the citizens at the closest house to contain arms. He was seen in the company of nine to ten slaves and heard by white persons to say if you will only be true you can get free. The slaves have been apprehended and brought before me, they state that he gave them money, treated them, and told them he had plenty of arms." He told the slaves that "he had got the negroes from Prince William County to join him and many others by some means got alarmed and immediately fled to Alexandria." He ended his note with an ominous postscript: "We have no arms to defend ourselves." The specter of Nero's "Chief" seemed to hover over the note. Strangers could not be trusted in a slave society on alert for abolitionists—white and black—who southerners believed sought the destruction of slavery at any cost.⁷²

⁷¹ Ibid., 101-102, 114-115.

⁷² G. Millan to John Floyd, Sept 9, 1833, Floyd Executive Papers, Library of Virginia.

From the moment David Walker's pamphlet arrived in Virginia and Georgia to Turner's insurrection and its aftermath, southern slaveholders recognized a subtle shift had taken place in their world. "Fanaticism" at one time seemed to be something foreign to the United States. During the scare following Gabriel's Rebellion, frightened southerners pointed to the influence of the French and Haitian Revolutions as a contributing factor that spurred Prosser's attempt to overthrow slavery in Richmond. Slaveholders and their allies, in total control of the federal machinery of government, promoted a stance in regards to Haiti that they believed would help insulate the southern states in America from the Haitian Revolution.

However, when Denmark Vesey cited Haiti as an ally in a war against white Charleston, that caused slaveholders, both in South Carolina and in neighboring areas, to react with harsher restrictions about who could and could not sail into their ports, this time using local authority to solidify the power of the master class. "Fanatical" influence on the slave population still seemed to be an issue of foreign policy instead of something to be debated domestically.

Things changed with *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. While David Walker made a global plea to nonwhites, his pamphlet and its southwide distribution were entirely American. Walker did not ask for a foreign entity to attack the South from the outside. Instead, he wanted to undermine American slavery by overthrowing it from within. He wanted an American version of Toussaint or Hannibal to rise from the South's enslaved population or come from the North's free black community. He did not urge the enslaved to wait for Haiti, France, or even England to

save them from their bondage; he wanted southern slaves to free themselves through violence.

Walker did not hide who he was or what he wanted to do. In distributing the pamphlet to readers in the South he relied on two vital American systems of communication, sailors and the mail. Unlike the secretive agents—real or imagined—from the outside that southerners blamed for infiltrating their slave population and causing problems, Walker brazenly attacked slavery in the United States and openly cried for insurrection to take place. The packages he mailed to the South clearly listed his return address. Walker assumed that at least some privileges granted in the Bill of Rights pertained to him and made use of his liberty to condemn southerners who believed he should have no rights to incendiary speech. Without local laws barring "incendiary pamphlets" and protected by the Constitution from any slaveholder in the federal government who might try to regulate him, Walker exerted his own prerogative granted to him as an American when he mailed his pamphlets to people throughout the slave states using the United States postal system. Northerners in Boston refused, despite their distaste for his pamphlet, to censor the black abolitionist.

David Walker took a chance when he assumed that certain inalienable rights granted to whites in Boston also pertained to him. He proved correct in his belief. Nationally, despite some southerners with minor influence asking for the federal government to take action against Walker, powerful slaveholding interests in Congress deferred. Locally, even the most conventional Bostonians believed the abolitionists' right to speak freely trumped the cries of powerful slaveholding politicians from the South who demanded action against the antislavery movement. The refusal of Harrison Gray

Otis showed southerners where the end of northern protection of slavery had been drawn. Northern politicians would not allow the demands of slaveholders to dictate what their local laws would be or in what fashion they would be enforced.

In reaction to Walker's pamphlet and Boston's refusal to practice the censorship of one of its citizens, the Deep South states produced harsh new regulations over their own society. For them, the attack on slavery, however small, needed to be met with harsh new regulations that made some outside the South uncomfortable with the repression. The Upper South did not take Walker's threat as seriously. A large portion of Virginians laughed at the overreaction to Walker's pamphlet by their proslavery governor. Only Turner's insurrection and the debate that almost ended slavery in Virginia caused the moderate proslavery advocates of the Upper South to side with the forces extremely committed to the continuation and protection of slavery. Nero's letter following Nat Turner's insurrection would only throw fuel on the fire of doubt in the southern mind about how willing northerners were to defend slavery in the South.

The debate over slavery in Virginia that followed Turner's insurrection represents a key stage in the South's development of a defense for slavery. It showed that antiblack sentiment could be fused with an antislavery political movement. Virginians who wanted to end slavery did not want to do so in order to help black people. Instead, Turner gave some southerners the opportunity to fuse racism with antislavery. For these white nonslaveholders, the existence of large black populations in their state threatened their security. They did not just want the end of slavery but also the end of black residence within proximity to their homes. Later, during the 1840s, similar concerns would be

articulated again, this time by some northern Democrats, the party that willfully defended slavery.

William Freehling and Lacy Ford are correct when they argue that southern slaveholders did not fear a *successful* slave revolution happening in the 1830s. They did not need to while the American military existed to bolster their defenses in the case of a large emergency. However, just because southerners believed that a Haitian-style revolution was not possible at present did not mean that slaveholders did not think such a thing could happen in the future. As in most cases, southerners made decisions based on their anticipation of future events. Despite Dew's insistence about the slave population not growing larger than the white one, many slaveholders in the South understood that the differences between slavery in the Caribbean and United States included the ability to expand slavery westward, thereby lessening a dangerous concentration of blacks in the older slave states, and a large white population in the North that had the obligation to defend their fellow citizens against an uprising. As a new kind of northern antislavery appeared to willingly and openly attack slavery from the North, a new proslavery argument developed out of a need to retain the allies that still existed who would protect slavery.⁷³

Thomas Roderick Dew articulated what became a foundational argument for proslavery forces for the next twenty years. In short, black people had better lives as slaves and would never develop an insurrectionary impulse without the influence of outside abolitionists who tricked them into doing so. Simultaneously, however, slavery

⁷³ Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 356-357; William W. Freehling, *The Road To Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990): 178-181.

also protected nonslaveholding whites from a black population that would not know what to do if they gained their freedom and would ransack the countryside as they reverted back to a form of barbarism. Only in perpetuating the status quo could both whites and blacks in the South be assured of their happiness and safety. For whites in the South, this meant that abolitionism became not just an attack on slavery but also an attack on the safety of the South. Just a few short months after the publication of Dew's *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature*, the South would have its world rocked. England chose Walker over Dew when Parliament decided to end slavery in the Caribbean. The South would have to shift its stance towards Great Britain as that nation went from a chief example of the practicality of slavery to a prime enemy of southern slavery. Throughout the 1830s security became the mainstay of the South's attack against the transnational antislavery movement that saw rapid growth in its ranks and organization. However, as slaveholders looked northward, their once trusted allies appeared to be growing apart from them and their peculiar institution.

Chapter Three

Transnational Abolitionism and American Exceptionalism

You cannot depend upon the North for any guaranty she gives you. She may stipulate and promise, and make Constitutions, but so far as slavery is concerned, she will observe none of these.

-Henry L. Benning's Secessionist Speech, Georgia, November 19, 1860

It screamed across the page: "HIGHLY IMPORTANT TO THE WEST INDIES" appeared in both the Charleston *Southern Patriot* and the Richmond *Enquirer*. The South's slaveholding neighbors came under successful attack from abolitionists in Parliament. The end of slavery in the Caribbean seemed near. Quoting an article from the London *Globe*, southern newspapers explained to their readership that the immediate emancipation of the enslaved of the English colonies appeared imminent. Both American newspapers reported that in response to the rumors of emancipation, "a deputation of gentlemen connected with the West Indies" had visited leaders in Parliament and "requested to be informed whether it was true that it was the intention of the government to emancipate the slave population." The answer the West Indian representatives received "was in the affirmative." In order to prevent chaos at this news, "an imposing force, composing of 15,000 men, would forthwith be sent to the West Indies." The English appeared to expect trouble with emancipation. So did the American planter class. Newspapers throughout the United States published reports about the debate in Parliament. Antislavery and proslavery forces understood that England ending slavery so close to the United States would have major ramifications for the institution in the Western Hemisphere. Some cited sources from Liverpool, and others from London.

Slaveholders especially worried about the effects British emancipation would have on their own slave societies.¹

Southern slaveholders anticipated unrest and trouble for the white, slaveholding population of the West Indies upon the freeing of the enslaved. American defenders of slavery throughout the slave states argued that abolition, especially without the apprenticeship system that eventually was included in the Abolition Act, would lead to freed blacks striking out against their former masters. Concerns over the security of slavery that stemmed from events in the Caribbean again filled the pages of southern periodicals as American proslavery forces predicted a repeat of the bloody race war that had engulfed Haiti during its revolution. In June 1833 the Richmond *Enquirer* declared, "The scheme appears to us to be woefully [sic] harsh" and would be "ruinous in its consequences." The paper worried that "even our own shores may not altogether escape the hurricane." As with their predecessors, American slaveholders prepared for unrest predicated on the toppling of a slaveholding regime in the West Indies.²

The British discussion of eventual emancipation of the enslaved in the West Indies gave proslavery forces in the South two targets to condemn: Great Britain and the ideology of free labor manufacturing. As slavery in the Caribbean came under attack in the House of Commons, American slaveholders adopted an argument first developed by their West Indian counterparts and later asserted by Thomas Dew—slavery had a positive

¹ Charleston *Southern Patriot* March 22, 1833; Richmond *Enquirer* March 26, 1833. Macon *Weekly Telegraph* April 10, 1833; Athens, Ga. *Southern Banner*, June 29, 1833. See also Charleston *Southern Patriot* May 8, 16, June 11, 18, 1833; Richmond *Enquirer* May 10, June 21, 25, July 26, 1833, and Charleston *Mercury* July 10, 16, 22, 23, 27, 30, 1833.

² Richmond *Enquirer* June 25, 1833; Joe Bassette Wilkins, "Widow on Freedom: The South's Response to the Emancipation of the Slaves in the British West Indies, 1833-1861" (Phd dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1977): 50-52, 68-70.

influence on society generally and blacks in particular. The historian Edward Rugemer has shown just how greatly British abolition contributed to the development of the South's bold defense of slavery throughout the 1830s. The debate in Virginia after Nat Turner showed that some southerners did not have the strident connection with slavery that had once been assumed. Like Virginia, a slave revolt had shaken England's Caribbean colonies and caused the planters of those islands to lose sympathy in the eyes of the British public. English abolition provided an example of the consequences of abolitionism left unchecked by a proslavery counterforce and showed that even the most engrained system of slavery could be toppled with the mere counting of votes and a signature placed on parchment. By the end of the decade, those in the Deep South would argue that a more active approach needed to be taken against the "fanaticism" of the North. The antislavery movement, the major proponents of slavery insisted, needed to be responded to with an active proslavery movement.³

During the summer months of 1833, proslavery forces in America attacked England's antislavery movement and free labor system. In August, just a few weeks before King William IV assented to abolition in the West Indies, a series of articles entitled "Poor Laws and Domestic Slavery" appeared in the Charleston *Mercury*, one of John C. Calhoun's media organs and a staunch defender of nullification. The newspaper's guest editorialist compared the lives of both the laboring class in England's manufacturing sector and the enslaved of the British West Indies with the treatment of

³ Edward Rugemer, "The Southern Response to British Abolitionism: The Maturation of Proslavery Apologetics," *The Journal of Southern History* 70 (May 2004): 221-248; Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 1987): 94-96; Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

blacks held in bondage across the American South. He also argued that slavery protected blacks from the racism they would experience as free people in the North.⁴

Most likely written by a member of the Palmetto State's planter elite under the pseudonym of "Pliny," the articles issued a tone of compassion for the poorest of society as they defended slavery and criticized England. Pliny began his series by writing, "To advance the condition of the labouring classes in comfort and security from misfortune, would be the most important improvement in human affairs." In one part of his series the proslavery author quoted Robert Southey, the English poet who had been disgusted by the squalor of the English factory workers. The state of the working class, the South Carolinian contended, displayed the hypocrisy of Britain's antislavery movement as it attempted to eliminate slavery from the western world but did nothing for white workers back home. England, he contended, should look at itself before criticizing the rest of the world.⁵

Articulating the "positive good" conception of slavery, Pliny argued that the enslaved of the South were materially better off than the poorest of England, despite the latter's status as freedmen. He took exception to abolitionist claims that planters treated blacks like cattle. The southerner wrote that the enslaved of the South, despite having "no political privilege," did however "have civil and moral rights." Blacks in the South were treated humanely, he insisted. Moreover, he pointed to Thomas Malthus and argued that while the slave populations of the West Indies had needed to import more workers to

⁴ The series appeared in the *Charleston Mercury*, August 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15. For an in depth discussion of Pliny's "Poor Laws and Domestic Slavery" and its place among proslavery intellectualism see Rugemer, "The Southern Response to British Abolitionism," 224-247.

⁵ *Charleston Mercury*, August 10, 1833.

retain its size under the brutal labor of British sugar plantations, the black population of the South had flourished. "This fact," the southerner maintained, "speaks volume in favor of the comfort of our negro population." The rise in the American slave population compared to the West Indies, Pliny argued, proved southern benevolence towards their slaves, unlike their European counterparts. While other southerners fretted over the rise of the black population, defenders of slavery against England simultaneously used population growth as proof of their humanitarianism. Southern defenders of slavery, though admitting that they shared a common bond with the planter class of the West Indies, wanted Americans to understand that slavery in the South was not the same as slavery in the Caribbean.⁶

Pliny's final article pointed to the mark of Ham, arguing that with slavery, "the protection they obtain in such a state of dependence, makes it the best condition *for them*. Slavery, for many southerners who attacked abolitionism, served to the betterment of the black population. This was especially true in comparison to places in the New World like Haiti, which had seen former slaves become independent, and thereby became "lost" to France because of "the mistaken zeal" of the antislavery movement's fanatical belief that if slavery "were abolished, all evil would be redressed, and society stand forth regenerated and perfect." Pliny argued that "fanatics" who promoted the end of slavery in the United States and England did not understand the connotations of their actions,

⁶ Charleston *Mercury*, August 15

because they had been blinded by the sheer emotion of desire to free all those held in enslavement in North America and the Caribbean.⁷

As seen through the example of Pliny, who desperately believed he needed to attack England and differentiate Caribbean slavery and American slavery, southern slaveholders clearly understood what was at stake with end of slavery in the West Indies. Proslavery advocates in the United States outwardly expressed concern about the prospect of islands dominated by freed slaves lying so close to their own slave society. Duff Green, the son-in-law and close political ally of John C. Calhoun, argued in the *United States Telegraph* that white planters would leave the Caribbean, allowing the island to become controlled by the newly freed blacks. Just as with the Haitian Revolution, slaveholders in the United States had concerns about the possibility of living so close to a large population of free blacks.⁸

Slaveholders throughout the United States worried about their security in regard to their soon-to-be-freed neighbors. Across the Atlantic Ocean, the American chargé d'affaires to Belgium, Hugh Swinton Legaré, considered the ramifications of West Indian emancipation for the South. In 1829 the young South Carolinian had written that southerners felt "no uneasiness at all about the event of any servile war, unless it be complicated with some other kind of war." Only outside pressure could cause unrest, he continued: "If our Northern friends will have the goodness to abstain...from propagating

⁷ Ibid., August 15. For an in depth discussion about the use of this Bible verse to justify slavery see Steven R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁸ *The Writings of Hugh Swinton Legaré, Volume II* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970): 292-293; See also: Michael O'Brien, *A Character of Hugh Legaré* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985): 169-185.

the impracticable and dangerous doctrines about universal emancipation and equality of rights," slavery would maintain its safety. The enslaved themselves would never think about revolting against their southern slave masters, Legaré argued. Without help from abroad, blacks who rebelled against the master class in the United States would have no chance at success. He continued, "Let [the slave's] conspiracy be unaided by foreign power, and it will be easily suppressed." Slavery might be dangerous, Legaré admitted, but it could only become fatal if white fanatics were left unchecked.⁹

Just a few years later, the possibility of foreign meddling in the American slave system appeared more likely as the House of Commons ended slavery in the Caribbean, just miles away from the southern border. Unlike the nullifiers who seemed to turn every political debate into one about defending slavery, Legaré had been a rising unionist from South Carolina and served as the state's attorney general at the young age of thirty-three before going to Europe and living in Belgium. For him, however, British emancipation created a cause for concern. He noted in a letter to his friend Issac E. Holmes that a West Indian planter had asked him about emigrating from the Caribbean to the United States. The lack of a planter class in the Caribbean, for Legaré, supplied a harmful new additive to a possible American slave insurrection. Furthermore, he told Holmes that, "Added to St. Domingo, [emancipation] will present you, at the mouth of the Mississippi, a *black* population of some 2,000,000, free from all restraint and ready for any mischief." Denmark Vesey, he remembered, had planned to partner with Haiti. A future rebel leader, he deduced alarmingly, had more options for an alliance at his disposal if much of

⁹ *The Writings of Hugh Swinton Legaré*, 292-293.

the Caribbean came under the control of a freed black population.¹⁰

Legaré was not the only notable southerner to consider the size of the black population in the Caribbean. Just a simple statistic could mean much to a slaveholder who, when peering over the Gulf, saw a free large free black population that wanted to enact revenge against all planters in the name of their race. The Columbus *Enquirer* in Georgia also remarked that the "blacks are to the white in the proportion to 11 to 1." The South appeared to be nearly surrounded by free soil. Indeed, they had become cornered: at the north by free soil and a growing antislavery movement, and at the east and south by freed blacks, suddenly empowered by the nation that the United States had already fought two wars against. Loyalty from northerners, whether by directly protecting slavery or abstaining from attacks on the institution and leaving decisions to slaveholders, was imperative to slaveholders after British emancipation in the Caribbean because the community of slaveholders had so significantly and suddenly dwindled.¹¹

Once again, southerners feared an invasion of their society from the outside. Just as American slaveholders worried the Haitian Revolution would spread to their shores in the 1790s, planters in the South feared that abolitionism in America would be bolstered by the success of the antislavery movement in Great Britain. South Carolinians especially felt pressure from British emancipation, because it followed so closely on the heels of the Nullification Crisis, when they were defeated by President Andrew Jackson's hard stance against the most ardent defenders of state's rights and slavery. In a letter to his son,

¹⁰ *The Writings of Hugh Swinton Legaré, Volume 1*, 17, 215; Washington D.C *United States Telegraph* May 22, 1834; Wilkins, "Window on Freedom," 42-43, 64-65; O'brien, *A Character of Hugh Legaré*, 165-166. For the Nullification debates see William W. Freehling, *Prelude to the Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836*.

¹¹ Columbus, Ga. *Enquirer*, August 10, 1833.

Charles Drayton II, a member of a wealthy planter family, wrote, "The great Slave question has started in England, if realized will transfer a great bearing on the United States: of course the whole evil will fall on the Southern section." American slaveholders, he warned, had to stay mindful of attacks against southern slavery as northern abolitionists gained a morale boost from the British Parliament. Ideas, after all, could spread like wildfire across the Atlantic and Caribbean—the early highways of information.¹²

In September 1833—just after the final announcement of the end of Caribbean slavery—the Charleston *Mercury* reprinted parts of a series of articles originally written in 1827 by Robert Turnbull, a man one historian has called "the archradical of the lowlands" of South Carolina for his staunch support of nullification. Since their original publication, Turnbull had expanded his thoughts into a pamphlet entitled "The Crisis." To proslavery forces in 1833, his words seemed prophetic. Six years before emancipation in the West Indies, the polemicist had pointed to William Wilberforce's example and warned that abolitionists in England would not stop at just ending the slave trade. Wilberforce, Turnbull wrote, "avowed that their sole object was *abolition* of the *trade*, and no more." However, that changed once he accomplished his goal: "Now in the fulness [sic] of time, he openly advocates a general emancipation." The antislavery movement, he insisted, had a plan of action to destroy slavery, not temper it. Those in

¹² Charles Drayton II to his son, August 13, 1833 in Drayton Letterbook, Drayton Hall, Charleston, SC quoted in both Joe Wilkins, "Window on Freedom: The South's Response to the Emancipation of the Slaves in the British West Indies," 60 and "Edward Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation*, vii.

favor of continuing slavery needed to understand that simple fact and prepare to defend themselves.¹³

In 1827, when Turnbull originally crafted his argument, he contended that if a small minority of abolitionists in the British House of Commons could turn into a majority, the same could happen in the United States. He wrote, "The minority in the British Parliament was at first trifling. I doubt if there were even twenty or ten in both Houses of Parliament who were for emancipation. But yet the West Indies are hastening, with a very quick step, towards complete ruin." For slaveholders in 1833, after the passage of the Abolition Act in England, his next statement seemed more powerful: "And so will South-Carolina assuredly be ruined, if at this day, there are twenty men in Congress, who are for emancipation, sudden or gradual, and the right of Congress to take even a vote, is not RESISTED as an ACT OF WAR by South-Carolina." Turnbull asked his fellow members of the proslavery movement whether they wanted to be "like the weak, the dependant, and unfortunate colonists of the West-Indies" or instead, stand up to possible federal action against slavery in Congress. Slaveholders, he insisted, had to be wary of the transnational antislavery movement becoming too large to fight back against. The editor of the *Mercury* added a note upon republishing Turnbull's writing: "Let every Southern man remember that like causes will produce like effects." Abolitionism seemed to be on the march; slaveholders, the newspaper warned, should be on their guard.¹⁴

¹³ Brutus [Robert Turnbull], *The Crisis: or, Essays on the Usurpations of the Federal Government* (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1827): 128; Wilkins, "The Window on Freedom," 61-62; William W. Freehling ed., *The Nullification Era: A Documentary Record* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967): 26-27.

¹⁴ Brutus [Turnbull], "The Crisis," 64, 132.

The discussion of British emancipation stoked fires that had been quelled after the Nullification Crisis. For example, Henry Clay saw old wounds reopened as southerners discussed news from England. He expressed this concern to James Madison, writing, "The political malcontents in the South seem to have adopted a new theme to excite alarm and to disseminate Unfriendly to the Union." Clay worried that emancipation in the West Indies "may give some aid to the efforts" to the former nullifiers and lead to another controversy.¹⁵

Clay was right. In response to British emancipation the streams of thought from the nullification debates resurfaced regarding American exceptionalism and its unique version of government. Two newspapers typified the opposing sides, the Richmond *Enquirer* edited by unionist Thomas Ritchie, and the Charleston *Mercury*, which built on its former editorialist's ideas and worked to protect slavery in the United States regardless of the cost. Throughout 1835, these two newspapers showed that the southerners divided on how best to protect slavery as well as how they anticipated the future of the nation's expanding democracy and federal power to continue in a changing world.

Thomas Ritchie trusted the Union, as created after the American Revolution, to protect slavery and urged moderation in southern attacks on the antislavery movement. The editor insisted that the South and the West Indies had significant differences that the ardent proslavery movement simply ignored when it predicted dangers for slavery in the United States. On the cusp of the end of West Indian slavery, Ritchie published a story with the headline, "ENGLISH EMANCIPATION." The article, parts of which had been

¹⁵ Henry Clay to James Madison, May 28, 1833 in *The Papers of Henry Clay*, eds. Robert Seager II and Melba Porter Hay (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984): 8: 643.

taken from another newspaper, argued the Founding Fathers had created a different system of governance than England. The British Parliament possessed "a power in the dearest points, over the lives and fortunes of thousands, when those who are most affected by their measures are unable to regulate or control them." Caribbean slaveholders had no real representation in Parliament, Ritchie told his readers; most of the representatives had no contact with slaveholders but did know members of the antislavery movement. The American slaveholder lived under a different kind of government—one that made the Union an exceptional example of a representative republic.¹⁶

The United States government had purposely been constructed differently from its British counterpart in the Palace of Westminster, the *Enquirer* reminded its readers. The Constitution, Ritchie wrote, created "an inherent and insoluble difficulty in the legislation concerning slave-holders and their property, by those who are not only not slave-holders themselves, but cannot be made to comprehend the nature of that relation." The article continued by saying that the discussion of slavery was "left so exclusively to the legislation of the several States, that the Congress of all the States cannot touch [slavery] without a palpable usurpation" of constitutional restrictions. "The silence" left by the Founders in regard to slavery was a "most wise one" because it put slaveholders in charge of slavery, unlike in England, where people who had never seen a slave decided the fate of the West Indies slave society. The Constitution protected slavery by not talking about it, and therefore it did not grant federal power to directly restrict it. With their northern allies agreeing to that principle, slavery would be safe and abolitionists would be scorned,

¹⁶ Richmond *Enquirer*, June 18, 1833

just like the nullifiers, for promoting disunion.¹⁷

After the passage of the Abolition Act, the *Enquirer* published a statement signed by "A Pennsylvanian" that contrasted the debate over slavery in England and America. The article stated, "The Anti-Slavery People, Tappan, Garrison, and Co. will find more difficulty in creating an excitement in the middle and Northern States for immediate abolition, than they did in England." The planters of the West Indies had very few allies in the British government, the northern author explained. "In that country, the position of the various parties gave a fatal facility to combinations in Parliament favorable to the measure. The fanatics, the whigs, the liberals all found it their interest to unite against the West Indian proprietors; the latter could only count on the tories." Without support from nonslaveholders a thousand miles away in Europe, slavery in the West Indies was doomed without direct representation in Parliament. Things would be different in a nation where slaveholders had a say in a government divided to create the checks and balances of power. The slaveholders in the South did not have the same political dependencies their Caribbean counterparts did.¹⁸

For Ritchie, the uniqueness of American government inherently made the South's position in defending slavery distinct from the rest of the slaveholding world. America's exceptional form of government alone, he exhorted, would protect American slavery from abolition and insurrection. However, the editor also wanted to remind his southern

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Richmond *Enquirer* October 15, 1833; Charles Henry Ambler, *Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics* (Richmond: Bell Book and Stationary, 1913): 176. Unfortunately, no modern biography of Thomas Ritchie has been written despite his active participation in politics between the second term of Thomas Jefferson and the Compromise of 1850.

readers that slavery still had protectors in the North. The "Pennsylvanian" continued his letter by showing the *sui generis* nature of the United States. He wrote, "In this country, the state of the political elements is altogether different. The southern States have an independent existence in Congress, besides having their rights expressly secured to them by the Constitution. The coalition of parties at the North is peculiarly hostile to any agitation of the slavery question. No tears, therefore, can grow out of the insane efforts of the agitators." Because no political issue could be made out of slavery that did not directly threaten the Union, there could be no way of creating an antislavery party in the fashion of Wilberforce's in England.¹⁹

Thomas Ritchie bristled at the notion that a few abolitionists could grow into a massive movement to end slavery by deploying federal power against the South's peculiar institution. He used his newspaper to trumpet a clear message when he printed the Pennsylvanian's letter: the United States of America was different from England, and southern slaveholders should never forget it. By publishing a message from a northerner that contrasted the differences between the South and the West Indies, Ritchie hoped to show slaveholders that they had allies unwilling to allow the Constitution to be stretched in order to prohibit slavery in the South. This added to sentiments already expressed by the likes of Daniel Webster during the controversy over nullification. The written Constitution of the United States refused to address slavery, at least directly, unlike the unwritten constitution of England.²⁰

While the *Enquirer* focused on the Union and its exceptional qualities derived

¹⁹ Richmond *Enquirer* October 15, 1833.

²⁰ Richmond *Enquirer* October 15, 1833; For Webster see Salem *Gazette*, March 5, 1833.

from the Constitution, Calhounites, led by the Charleston *Mercury*, built on principles first established during the nullification controversy. Instead of strictly sticking to the arguments about state's rights, they expanded their understanding of the American federal system and what should be done to protect slavery. If the Constitution served as the rulebook that Thomas Ritchie believed every political power under its jurisdiction needed to follow, the *Mercury* argued that the rules only meant something if they could be enforced. They stressed that the referee held as much power as the rules. Throughout 1835 and 1836, in an extraordinary transition from their earlier arguments based upon states' rights, the proslavery movement claimed the founding documents did not have the capability to protect slaveholders from a persistent majority in favor of the abolition of slavery. Calhoun's former followers wanted active government protection of slavery without and worried little about moving the Overton window of an empowered federal government or the possible ramifications regarding slavery's future. By allowing the federal government to protect slavery, southerners allowed the public see Washington's involvement with slavery as something that was sensible, regardless of whether it was proslavery or antislavery.

The *Mercury* challenged Thomas Ritchie directly by publishing an article from one of the *Enquirer's* rival newspapers in Virginia. In a July 6, 1833, article entitled "SLAVERY—WEST INDIES: State Rights," published a month before the passage of British emancipation, the newspaper responded to the *Enquirer's* argument that American slaveholders could not be compared to planters in the British Caribbean. The *Mercury* article said, "True, [Ritchie] may say that Virginia has representatives in Congress, which the West India Planters have not in Parliament—but what that?" For the ardent

proslavery forces, representation meant very little. The newspaper declared that despite their representation, proslavery members of Congress could not "control those persons who can control their lives and fortunes." Instead, the *Mercury* contended, southern "voices are merged in the clamors of the majority. They are neither heard nor felt." The majority, they believed, always had the ability to shout down the minority.²¹

According to the Charleston *Mercury* the Constitution of the United States had not created an exceptional government. Alternatively, the Founders had not even constructed a government that, in de facto, could be differentiated from England's, which had ended slavery. The newspaper put forward a hypothetical situation to its readers: "Suppose the Federal Government, should do as the British Parliament has done, and bring out its scheme of Emancipation?" The pro-nullification author used the answer to mock the *Enquirer's* defense of unity and equality between the states. The article asked:

"What is Virginia to do?—'Remonstrate,' says Mr. Ritchie. What next? 'Protest,' says Mr. Ritchie. What Next?—'Rush to revolution,' says Mr. Ritchie.—What next? 'Be hanged like dogs,' says A. Jackson, Esquire. And pray, may not the W. India Planters do these very things?"

For these strident defenders of slavery, the South needed more than the Constitution and the representation granted to slaveholders in Congress. Rather, the South needed to be able to control the machinery of the federal government to ensure that their conceptions of federalism would remain unchanged by those who opposed them.²²

²¹ Charleston *Mercury*, July 6, 1833.

²² Ibid.

The Charleston *Mercury* came very close to arguing that Andrew Jackson had spoiled the Constitution during the nullification controversy, rendering it useless in regards to protecting slavery. Because "the Jackson Van Buren Party" had "deserted the principles of the Constitution," the newspaper contended, the United States had begun going down a path in which it no longer would serve as a beacon of freedom in a world ruled by kings and tyrants. Instead, the newspaper claimed, "The doctrines of these men are of the very essence of monarchy, and must speedily reduce the States to the abject condition of the West India Colonies, unless their progress be arrested."²³ Old Hickory's action had shown that the Constitution was indeed more flexible than many Unionists cared to admit, the ardent proponents of slavery maintained.

Despite the *Enquirer's* arguments otherwise, the existence of America's founding doctrines did not inherently make the creation of the United States government exceptional. Those in control of how the American principles of government became defined mattered also. The *Mercury*, and other outlets that agreed with the newspaper, believed Thomas Ritchie—and those southerners who agreed with him—had abandoned "*principles to support men*" and instead "flattered" himself "to live upon the profits of popular delusion and ignorance." Ritchie's faith in the Union, they believed, led him to be blinded by the incremental increase of power by the antislavery movement and its coincidence with the strengthening of federal power under Andrew Jackson. The Constitution alone could not protect American slaveholders from a possible majority who opposed them and their system of labor because it had not created a government different

²³ Ibid.

than that of England.²⁴

The theme among southerners to disparage the usefulness of the Constitution in protecting slavery from abolitionists had grown since Nat Turner's rebellion. After the 1831 Southampton revolt, Virginia's governor, John Floyd, had written privately in his diary that "we are gravely told there is no law to punish" abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison, whom he believed had the "the express intention of inciting the slaves and free negroes in this and other States to rebellion and to murder the men, women and children" of the South. He planned to make a note of his sentiment to the Virginia legislature. Just two years later, Floyd's ideas had become a part of the mainstream proslavery movement.²⁵

In the same July 6 issue of the *Mercury* that attacked Thomas Ritchie, the editor published another broadside against the North and the federal government controlled by Andrew Jackson. After blaming the North for some of the South's economic woes, the *Mercury* again compared the federal government to Great Britain by quoting charges against England in the Declaration of Independence as indictments against it. The newspaper claimed grievances from "imposing taxes on us without consent" to rendering "the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power." Other major points in the list included "exciting 'domestic insurrections amongst us" and conducting at attack on the South where the "known rules of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions." For insurrection scares, the newspaper blamed not only abolitionists but the federal government, which they also called on for help during a

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Charles H. Ambler, *The Life and Diary of John Floyd: Governor of Virginia, An Apostle of Secession, and the Father of Oregon Country* (Richmond, Richmond Press, 1918): 161-162.

revolt.²⁶

A major belief that separated Thomas Ritchie, the unionist, from his counterparts in South Carolina, who favored a more active approach to defending slavery, was their trust of the northern commitment to the South and their understanding of the free states. The *Mercury* treated the North as a foreign entity, something that needed to be infiltrated in order to gain information on the antislavery movement. In the eyes of the proslavery movement, the antislavery movement and the northern population in general had become synonymous and could not be separated. Even when northerners said they did not support the abolitionist movement, these southern slaveholders believed they were purposely covering their fanatical sentiments. By asserting that northerners spoke a version of coded language, proslavery forces could point to northerners who did not even hold antislavery beliefs and claim their statements were all part of a "fanatic" dialogue, thus adding to the southern distrust of northern intentions. They viewed the free states as separate from the South, and an enemy to their ideology. The *Mercury* supplied the most sparkling examples of this phenomenon.

Going to the North, for some writers in the *Mercury*, became treated as if it were going behind enemy lines during a period of war. In the summer of 1833 the newspaper published a letter from "A Spy In New York" that read like an intelligence briefing. The author thought British emancipation had boosted the morale of the antislavery movement. His report read, "The Gladiators are in extasies [sic] at the latest news from England, viz: that all the slaves will be let loose on the Kings birth day. They have an idea that emancipation of the slaves in the West Indies will have a very great influence on the

²⁶ Charleston *Mercury*, July 6, 1833.

south." The spy stated that "fanatical rascals" were "continually at work, with a zeal worthy of a better cause" and explained that when members of the Colonization Society looked to raise funds they lied to southerners. When they asked for money in the North, he contended, they told people that they wanted to emancipate slaves in the slave states. However, "when the agents of the society are begging for money in the slaveholding States, their tone is changed: then they beg money to carry off the *free* negroes who are contaminating the slaves with notions of liberty." Fanatical abolitionists would say anything to get their way, and the rest of the northern population would willfully ignore their tactics.²⁷

Whereas the *Enquirer* published articles from "A Pennsylvanian" to show that some northerners still wanted to protect slavery, the *Mercury* always viewed northern motives with a skeptical eye. A correspondent to the Charleston newspaper supplied an article from the New York *Commercial Advertiser* written by "An Anti-slavery Citizen." The New York author contended that many northern members of the antislavery movement differed with their counterparts in England. He argued that immediate emancipation from some in the North "did not mean political emancipation." Instead, some of those who advocated immediate emancipation, the article explained, did so as a way to promote moral suasion against slaveholding. The northerner continued, "Anti slave men preach the doctrine of immediate emancipation to slaveholders, as divines preach the doctrine of immediate repentance to sinners. They aim at consciences and hearts of the slaveholders." Southerners, the writer promised, could trust the North to keep the black population under the control of white planters. Immediate emancipation

²⁷ Charleston *Mercury*, Jul 23, 1833. See also May 31, 1833.

was more an abstract idea, for some moderate proponents of antislavery, than a concrete policy initiative to be put into effect when the opportunity arose.²⁸

The antislavery advocate's words, republished in the *Mercury*, declared that immediate emancipation could not be forced on southerners. He believed that slavery should be debated as a social issue instead of a political one. He wrote, "As political men then anti-slavery men must be quiet" and insisted that some northern opponents of slavery did not want to set "the slave free to roam without restraint, to live in idleness; to butcher the whites, and to be lawless." Some in the North accepted the premise that a freed black population would lead to danger for whites. Moreover, this northern proponent of antislavery still presumed that southerners alone should control the future of slavery. The planter class of the South could still expect northerners, even some who supported abolitionism, to promote local control over the slave system.²⁹

The *Mercury*, however, remained unconvinced. The analysis offered by this newspaper showed how distanced from the North some southern members of the proslavery class had become. Its editor wrote, "We give place to the following communication as a temperate and well expressed article upon the subject which it treats; and are fully confident that our correspondent is sincere in his aim to act upon the consciences and hearts of slaveholders *only*, and not interfere with the political compact between the States." However, sincerity meant nothing for the editor of the *Mercury*. He wrote, "It is admitted that as 'political men the anti-slavery men must be silent.' The article asked, "By what process then are their mouths to be opened in such a manner as

²⁸ Charleston *Mercury*, July 10, 1833.

²⁹ Ibid.

that the principles they utter shall be divested of their political effect?" If all of free speech was to be protected under the Constitution, the antislavery movement, regardless of its size, could not be separated from American politics under the current system. Abolitionism would always garner influence from the northern population. Even when northerners claimed that abolitionists should leave slavery alone, their actions, or in this case, inaction, meant more than words or genuine sentiment. Two years later, slaveholders would again reiterate that federally protected speech could not be consistent with a secure slave system.³⁰

Just as with David Walker's *Appeal*, their society became infiltrated by the mail—specifically, on the ship *Columbia* on July 29, 1835, as it steamed into a South Carolina harbor. Those in Charleston who expected to receive news from across the Atlantic would be disappointed. The *Southern Patriot* reported that the ship's cargo "had no further intelligence from Europe, and that the papers are commonly barren in information of any novelty or importance." However, those who kept reading most likely became startled at what the *Columbia* had brought to their state. Under the large headline of "INCENDIARY TRACTS AND PAPERS," the *Mercury* said the steamship had not been "merely laden, but literally overburthened, with the Newspaper 'The Emancipator' and two Tracts entitled 'The Anti-Slavery Record,' and 'The Slave's Friend,' destined for circulation all over the Southern and Western Country." Slaveholders again prepared to squelch pamphlets they believed might spur insurrection and topple slavery in the South.³¹

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Charleston *Southern Patriot*, July 29, 1835. Numerous historians have discussed the Abolitionist postal

The slaveholders were not entirely overreacting in their denunciation of the antislavery mails as an invasion, since the conspirators, themselves, had intended the mailing to act as such. In 1832 William Lloyd Garrison—a main proponent of immediate emancipation for those held in bondage in the United States—organized the American Anti-slavery Society. By 1835 his organization had raised and set aside \$30,000 for mailing antislavery tracts to slaveholders in order to persuade southerners to reconsider the enslavement of blacks on their plantations and in their cities. Throughout the summer of 1835, abolitionists mailed over 170,000 antislavery tracts—a number that equaled the entire output of southern media throughout the slave states. The *Columbia* carried one of the first packets to the South. The *Southern Patriot* called the action a "monstrous abuse of the privilege of the public mail" and called the antislavery writings "moral poison." The newspaper insisted, "Some mode of prevention should be adopted to abate this nuisance" and claimed that if nothing legally could be done by the Post Office, it would be "impossible to answer for the security of the Mail in this part of the country, which contains such poisonous and inflammatory matter." Many Charlestonians looked to their postmaster, Alfred Huger, a unionist during the nullification crisis, to make a difficult

campaign, see Freehling, *Prelude to the Civil War*, 340-346; Donna Lee Dickerson, *The Course of Tolerance: Freedom of the Press in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990): 81-113; Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995): 257-280; W. Sherman Savage, "Abolitionist Literature in the Mails, 1835-1836," *The Journal of Negro History* 13 (April 1928): 150-184; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Abolitionists' Postal Campaign of 1835," *Journal of Negro History* 50 No 4 (Oct. 1965): 227-238; Susan Wyly-Jones, "The 1835 Anti-Abolition Meetings in the South: A New Look at the Controversy over the Abolition Postal Campaign," *Civil War History* xlvii (2001): 289-309; Jennifer Rose Mercieca, "The Culture of Honor: How Slaveholders Responded to the Abolitionist Mail Crisis of 1835," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10 (2007): 51-76.

decision that he did not want to make.³²

Others, however, did not wait for an official position. Only a few hours after the *Southern Patriot* broke the news, leading slaveholders in South Carolina devised a plan to take the matter into their own hands. They prepared to set an example for the rest of the South by offering a harsh response to the northern abolitionists. That evening, members of the city's vigilance society, a group named the Lynch Men, broke into the post office and stole antislavery pamphlets. Luckily for them, Huger had conveniently separated the tracts from the rest of the mail as he awaited word from his boss, Postmaster General Amos Kendall, on how to handle the provocative pamphlets. In a letter to Kendall written the following day, Huger described what happened and how he had planned to deal with the situation until he received further instruction. He explained that he had no control when the Lynch Men broken in to the office: "One of the windows was forced open by means of a crow bar, or some such implement; and however deeply I lament this occurrence, I cannot see how I would have prevented it. It is evident that the mail would have received the same violence, had the obnoxious papers been transmitted."³³

Huger felt helpless to stop the raid on the Post Office. Even if he tried to get in the way of those who wanted the pamphlets destroyed, he knew he would be unsuccessful. Despite his belief in the centrality of the federal government, the Charleston postmaster informed Kendall that he would work with local officials until a resolution to the crisis could be found. He wrote, "I informed the leading men of both political parties that I should assume the responsibility of keeping back the incendiary publications until the

³² Charleston *Southern Patriot*, July 29, 1835; Dickerson, *The Course of Tolerance*, 85-86; John, *Spreading the News*, 260-261.

³³ Alfred Huger to Amos Kendall, July 30, 1835 published in Richmond *Enquirer*, August 25, 1835.

wishes of the Postmaster-General were expressed. All seemed satisfied with this arrangement.” He ended his letter by telling the Postmaster General of the United States that the thieves had no plans to hide their crimes; rather, a bonfire fueled by the antislavery tracts had been planned. The city's community would not punish them.³⁴

During the evening that followed the break-in, the Lynch Men stayed true to their word. The smell of burning paper filled the air on the parade grounds of the city. The buildings, which later would become the Citadel—the South Carolina military academy—served as a picturesque background as the smoke blurred the white buildings of the nearby campus. Angry members of the proslavery movement lit thousands of pamphlets ablaze, along with the effigies of prominent antislavery leaders like Garrison and Tappan, as hundreds looked on. Slaveholders hoped they had sent a message to the abolitionists that their unsolicited tracts were unwanted in the South.³⁵

The Charleston *Mercury* surprisingly condemned the actions as rash and "premature." Though insisting that "none could blame" those who broke into the post office, the newspaper believed that slaveholders had missed an opportunity. Instead of immediately burning the pamphlets, the newspaper maintained the abolitionist mailings could have provided a test to see if the federal government would "protect us in our rights." Furthermore, the *Mercury* continued: "We think it would have been better had the pamphlets been allowed to reach their destination, to put the whole Southern community on their guard." The abolitionists had given the proslavery movement a chance to unify the South. Despite the fact that the antislavery pamphlets had been turned

³⁴ Ibid; Wyly-Jones, "A New Look at the Controversy over the Abolition Postal Campaign, 289.

³⁵ Wyly-Jones, "A New Look at the Controversy over the Abolition Postal Campaign, 289.

into ashes, however, the pro-nullification periodical would still get its wish. Much of the South united against this brash act by the abolitionists.³⁶

Slave states, much like during the firestorm over the appearance of *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, set aside political differences and staged local rallies against the antislavery incursion into their society. In Tennessee, the *National Banner and Nashville Whig* reported, "In our town the excitement has become great...A handbill of the most insidious and inflammatory nature was last week posted up at the corners, evidencing that the miserable fanatics are moving with concern, and that their plan of operations is wide spread." The *Richmond Whig* gave an account of a steamboat passenger in Kentucky who found a copy of "Human Events" and declared, "one example of a coat of tar and feathers would be more effective than any argument, in cooling the zeal of these incendiaries." In Norfolk, the *Herald* spoke of "a bundle of incendiary missiles from the abolitionists' pandemonium in New York," and maintained that, despite antislavery claims otherwise, "20 or 30 copies mailed for this post office, *were directed to free negroes* in the borough and vicinity," thus giving credence in the southern mind that abolitionists intended to spark a rebellion. The *Niles' Weekly Register* reported "many other southern newspapers" had "paragraphs of a similar character." While abolitionists did not back down, claiming their right to free speech, vigilance became the watchword of the South in August 1835.³⁷

The mailings rallied white southerners of all stripes against the abolitionists.

Thomas Ritchie's *Richmond Enquirer* joined the call for the slave states "to guard, by the

³⁶ *Charleston Mercury*, July 31, 1835.

³⁷ *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, August 5, 1835; *Charleston Mercury*, July 30, 1835; *Niles' Weekly Register* vol. 48, 402-403.

severest punishment, against the circulation of such papers from the Post Office." He argued the public mail needed to be regulated. The newspaper also blamed the antislavery movement for threatening to cause disunion. The *Enquirer* pleaded with northerners to guard the Union by keeping the question of slavery outside of the federal government's reach. He wrote, "We warn the North again and again--to guard the Union and strip the Fanatics of all power and the Factions of all excuse." Two years earlier the Virginian editor argued against the nullifiers, claiming the exceptional nature of the American founding documents provided the answer for dealing with the question of slavery by not mentioning the issue at the national level. By mailing dangerous tracts to the South, he believed, abolitionists had acted much like radical slaveholders and overreached with their ideology to threaten national unity.³⁸

Ritchie found himself caught between northerners unwilling to stop the antislavery movement from mailing their tracts to the South and proslavery forces who called for radical measures to prevent the circulation of "incendiary pamphlets" throughout the South. Ritchie called for his readers to be leery of both the "Fanatics" and the "Factionous," the former being abolitionists, the latter being the ardent proslavery movement. In articulating his moderate vision, he argued that "both are equally worthy of scorn and indignation of every honorable man." Each side, blinded by their ideology, he claimed, threatened what made the United States unique—the Union. When they threatened to ignore the Constitution's silence on the subject of slavery, they only offered destruction to the American experiment in democracy.³⁹

³⁸ Richmond *Enquirer* August 4, 1835

³⁹ Ibid.

Despite its large impact on the national scene, both in publications and in politics, Ritchie knew that abolitionism only consisted of a small portion of the northern population. He quoted the *Baltimore Republican*, which argued that slaveholders had support in the North because most northerners believed that "there is no one who has resided in places where the number of free blacks is large, who can fail to be sensible that it would be very imprudent to do anything which would have the effect to increase the number." The Baltimore newspaper said that whites in both New York and Philadelphia "furnish abundant evidence of the fact" and contended that animus towards the antislavery movement came from feelings of hostility towards blacks living in both the North and South, both free and enslaved.⁴⁰

Ritchie used northern denunciations of the abolitionist postal campaign as evidence to criticize newspapers like the *Mercury* for purposely dividing the North and the South. Northerners still strongly opposed abolition, he insisted. Both the antislavery and proslavery movements should be viewed as simply two sides of the same coin, each believing in their own radical solutions while undermining what made the United States unique. Ritchie exhorted that most northerners would remain against abolition because of their antipathy towards the black population, which promoted a feeling that slavery acted as a way to control an unwanted sector of American society. So long as the North rejected the idea of having a large, free black population living in the United States, slavery would be safe and those who said otherwise would seem like fools. The white population in the free states would never support a slave over a white person.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

A few days later, the *Enquirer* cited the Boston *Atlas* as further proof that northerners still supported the South. The newspaper called for a meeting of city leaders to discuss the Abolitionist postal campaign. It wrote, "Let the Websters, and Otises, and Adamses...be invited to attend, to vindicate the fair fame of our city. Let a manifesto go forth declaratory of our sentiments, as to the rights of the South, and of our abhorrence of the conduct of those combinations...encouraging the worst of all possible calamities which can befall a nation—A CIVIL AND SERVILE WAR." At least a large portion of northerners believed in the Bryan Edwards idea about insurrection and saw abolitionism not just as a risk to the Union but also as a threat to national security. Some in the free states thought that insurrections and the freeing of the enslaved black population of the South would directly affect their lives. The *Atlas* was not alone; other southern newspapers published similar outcries by northern newspapers against abolitionism.⁴²

Alexis de Tocqueville also described the American fear of insurrection in his book *Democracy in America*. He wrote, "Hitherto, wherever the whites have been the most powerful, they have maintained the blacks in a subordinate or a servile position; wherever the negroes have been strongest they have destroyed the whites; such has been the only retribution which has ever taken place between the two races." In the following weeks and months after the initial arrival of abolitionist tracts on the *Columbia*, proslavery forces responded by organizing themselves, looking to their northern allies, and waiting to see how the federal government would deal with the publications they deemed so dangerous to their slave society.⁴³

⁴² Richmond *Enquirer*, August 7, 1835; see also *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, August 12, 1835.

⁴³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* ed. Bruce Frohnen (Washington D.C.: Regnery

Frightened southerners genuinely believed the tracts could cause an insurrection by the enslaved population. One resolution passed at a meeting in Lincolnton, Georgia called the abolitionists "bloody Jacobins?—worse than the St. Domingo rioters and cutthroats." The Richmond Vigilance Committee argued that the discussion abolitionists wanted to have about slavery really revolved around whether or not the South should exist as a white-occupied area. The committee stated in the preamble to their resolutions against the abolitionists that "there is no means of removing the coloured ones—and the consequences, therefore, of the scheme of the abolitionists, must be the destruction of our race by force, or, what is yet more odious and detestable, by 'amalgamation,' or the merciless extermination of the black." In defending themselves against the antislavery movement, slaveholders positioned themselves as defending America's white republic and called on their northern allies to join them.⁴⁴

The North reacted similarly to the incident. In the wake of the antislavery literature arriving in South Carolina, anti-abolition meetings sprang up mostly in the Atlantic states where slavery had been most firmly established. Susan Wyly-Jones, a historian of the abolitionist mailing campaign, examined the meetings and has shown that they typically had two aims: painting the abolitionists as fanatics and strengthening local militias and slave patrols, both of which they believed were intimately connected to

Publishing, 202): 283.

⁴⁴ Richmond *Enquirer*, September 29, 1835; During the same summer as the postal campaign, a bandit was accused of trying to launch an insurrection in Mississippi. Many members of the proslavery movement tied his antics to abolitionism conflating the antislavery movement's so-called religious fanaticism to also represent banditry and murder. See David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 154-156.

defending the slavery against the abolitionist schemes to spark slave insurrection.⁴⁵

Northerners did respond to calls from the South to act against abolitionism. The postmaster of New York, Samuel Gouverneur, the son-in-law of former President James Monroe, asked Arthur Tappan, the president of the American Anti-Slavery Society, to suspend the mailings "until the views of the postmaster general be received" after Alfred Huger had requested his assistance. In Ohio, even those who opposed slavery still attacked the idea of immediate emancipation. For instance, the *Ohio State Journal and Columbus Gazette* denounced immediate abolition as "the mischievous schemes of designing fanatics." They wrote, "if it was believed for a moment that the fanatic could injure the people of the South, the men of the North would put their feet upon them and crush out their venom; and if servile war should ever arise in the South, let the men of the north be but called upon and they will trample it down at once." The mayor of New York wrote that he believed nine-tenths of his city opposed the abolitionists.⁴⁶

At town meetings from Portland, Maine, to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—some being described as "being held without regard to party"—citizens passed motions that, despite recognizing slavery as immoral, condemned the abolitionist mailings. In Philadelphia, for example, a resolution read: "That we respond to the call of our brethren of the south, that we are their brethren and, as such, sympathize...and view with regret and indignation the incendiary measures which have disturbed their tranquility" and further pledged that "the young men of the north are prepared to meet the danger" and assist the South if an insurrection of the enslaved did occur. Furthermore, the meeting

⁴⁵ Wylie-Jones, "The 1835 Anti-Abolition Meetings in the South," 299-304.

⁴⁶ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 48: 448, 49: 73; *Ohio State Journal and Columbus Gazette*, August 7, 1835.

resolved, "we regard the union of this country as inseparable from its freedom, greatness, and glory; that we consider no sacrifice too great to maintain it." Like Thomas Ritchie in Virginia, people across the North viewed the abolitionists in the same fashion as the nullifiers; Union trumped fervid expressions of antislavery and proslavery.⁴⁷

After the postal campaign, northerners who supported the southern right to slavery acted out against the antislavery movement. Violence against antislavery meetings rose drastically during 1835 and 1836, especially after the arrival of their pamphlets to the South. A few of the most well known antislavery crusaders had even been physically injured. Theodore Weld, for example, had been struck in the head with a rock at one antislavery gathering. The most famous example of these actions, though, occurred on October 24, 1835, in Boston. Merchants of the city mobbed William Lloyd Garrison at a meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and threatened to injure the antislavery editor before he was rescued from some of the most violent members of the proslavery mob. Northerners either fueled by antipathy towards blacks or from commercial connections to the South defended American slaveholders against the antislavery movement in the North. They also valued the Union and challenged those who they believed threatened it by acting outside of the constitutional framework established by the founders, much like they would do twenty-five years later when fire-eaters sparked secession. Southerners view the North's reaction in a positive light, for the most part, seeing the attacks on abolitionists as their ally showing its loyalty. However, the strongest attack against the abolitionists who mailed tracts to the South would come from the man they formerly denounced, Andrew Jackson, and his postmaster general

⁴⁷ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 48: 455-456. Dickerson, *The Course of Tolerance*, 91-92.

Amos Kendall.⁴⁸

Unlike David Walker's *Appeal*, the abolitionist mailing campaign immediately became a national issue because of its size and scope, along with the government-run post office being the main courier of the pamphlets. When *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* first came to South Carolina, some requested that the federal government censor Walker, though the state's senator rebuked the idea because he believed the issue should be resolved among the states. As tracts from the North came to the South and slaveholders claimed they threatened their security and attacked federal post offices, officials of the national government had no choice but to play a role in deciding how to treat the mailings at the highest levels of government.

Postmaster General Amos Kendall acted first. Born in Massachusetts, educated in New Hampshire, but settled in Kentucky where he thrived as an editor of a Jacksonian newspaper, the postmaster general served as a member of Andrew Jackson's "Kitchen Cabinet." On August 4, Kendall responded to the urgent request from Alfred Huger. A few weeks later, the postmaster general's letter became published for the nation to read. Kendall wrote, "Upon a careful examination of the law, I am satisfied that the postmaster general has no legal authority to exclude newspapers from the mail, nor prohibit their carriage or delivery on account of their character or tendency, real or supposed." He explained that he did not "want to confer to the head of an executive department a power over the press, which might be perverted or abused." However, despite his reluctance to censor the mail directly, Kendall told Huger that he was also "not prepared to direct you

⁴⁸ Grimsted. *American Mobbing*, 35-35, 293; Theodore M. Hammett, "Two Mobs of Jacksonian Boston: Ideology and Interest," *Journal of American History* 62 (March 1976): 845-868; Leonard L. Richards, *"Gentlemen of Property and Standing": Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970): 51-74.

to forward or deliver the papers." The reason, he stated, came from the reason the postal system had been created in the first place: "the post office department was created to serve the people of *each* and *all* of the *United States*, and not to be used as the instrument of their *destruction*."⁴⁹

Though he agreed the law said otherwise, Kendall felt forced to protect the South. He found a way to justify undermining the law and preventing the controversial tracts from being delivered by the American postal system. The postmaster general wrote to his deputy in South Carolina, "We owe an obligation to the laws, but a higher one to the communities in which we live, and if the *former* be perverted to destroy the *latter*, it is patriotism to disregard them. Entertaining these views, I cannot sanction, and will not condemn the step you have taken" by refusing to deliver the mail. One of the leading Jacksonians thus endorsed a version of nullification that used individual employees of the federal government instead of state legislatures. He granted each local postmaster the authority to determine what should and should not be delivered through the American mail service.⁵⁰

Kendall's actions sparked a debate among newspapers in the North. Some criticized the postmaster general. The *New York Evening Post* condemned the postmaster's actions and called for him to resign. The newspaper asked, "Who gives him a right to judge of what is incendiary and inflammatory? Was there any reservation of that sort in his oath of office." The Boston *Atlas*, which had condemned the abolitionists,

⁴⁹ *Niles' Weekly Register* vol. 48, 448; For a biography of Amos Kendall, see Donald B. Cole, *Jackson Man: Amos Kendall and the Rise of American Democracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ *Niles' Weekly Register* vol. 48, 448.

also chastised Kendall's letter. It inquired, "What *higher duty* can we owe to the community in which we live, than to obey the laws which that community has framed? Is an individual, or class of individuals, to say—we deem such a law to be unjust, and it is *patriotism* in us to disregard it?" The *Atlas* exclaimed, "There was but one course for the postmaster general to have pursued; and that it to have directed his subordinate officer to follow the law as it was laid down, and leave the result to the law." Without following the laws, the rights granted in the Constitution would be meaningless.⁵¹

Much of the northern media, however, supported the prevention of antislavery tracts being mailed to the South and praised Kendall's actions. The Albany *Argus* said the postmaster's decision was a "prompt, liberal, and just reply." A newspaper in Cincinnati argued that laws could not be enforced without the will of the people and that laws could only work if those who enforced them had been given a certain amount of discretion in their application. The New York *Commercial Advertiser* took censorship of the antislavery movement one step further. It wrote, "If the madmen who are scattering firebrands, arrows and death, cannot be persuaded, or 'rebuked' to silence, we see no other alternative, than for the slaveholding states to protect themselves, by establishing all the odious machinery of passports and examinations, to which travelers in Europe are subjected." The slaveholders still had allies in the North.⁵²

Southern newspapers varied in their responses to Kendall's conception of a "higher law" and the possibility of postmasters gaining authority to censor mail they

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Niles' Weekly Register* vol. 48, 448; Albany *Argus* quotation from Theodore Sedgwick ed., *A Collection of Political Writings of William Leggett, volume II* (New York: Taylor and Dodd, 1840): 18-20; Dickerson, *The Course of Tolerance*, 89-90.

deemed incendiary. In Natchez, Louisiana, a newspaper asked with bluster, "Where is the man in the South who would not rather receive a bushel of abolition trash, (which can easily burn,) than to have his own private affairs pried into by every rascally deputy postmaster, or clerk, who might choose to say he suspected they contained incendiary matter?" For this southerner, his privacy trumped any concern that the pamphlets could get into the wrong hands and cause trouble with the enslaved population. However, most southern newspapers praised the postmaster general for his actions. The Athens, Georgia *Southern Banner* for example, wrote, "In justice to Mr. Kendall's views, and the propriety of the course he has adopted...there is, we believe, but one opinion here; and that is one of *unqualified appropriation*." Overall, the South supported Kendall's actions as the nation awaited to see any official reaction from the White House.⁵³

As part of dealing with the attacks on the Charleston post office, Amos Kendall sent a copy of his Huger letter and an explanation of his motives for suspending the delivery of the antislavery tracts to the White House. He told Andrew Jackson that he believed "these steps carried out will pacify the South." Old Hickory agreed. The president, a slaveholder, concurred with the idea that abolitionism often led to insurrection. He responded to the postmaster general, "I have read with sorrow and regret that such men live in our happy country—I might have said monsters—as to be guilty of the attempt to stir up amongst the South the horrors of servile war—Could they be reached, they ought to be made to atone for this wicked attempt, with their lives."⁵⁴

⁵³ Natchez, La. *Courier*, quoted in *The Anti-Slavery Record* vol. II (New York: R. G. Williams, 1836): 164; Athens, Georgia *The Southern Banner*, September 24, 1835; Dickerson, *The Course of Tolerance*, 90-91.

⁵⁴ Amos Kendall to Andrew Jackson, August 7, 1835; Andrew Jackson to Amos Kendall, August 9, 1835 both in John Spencer Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson V* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1931): 359-361.

Unfortunately for the president, the law said otherwise. He wrote to Kendall, "But we are the instruments of, and executors of the law; we have no power to prohibit anything from being transported in the mail that is authorized by law." Because of how the law was understood under the Constitution, Jackson continued by telling Kendall, "the only thing that can be done is what you suggested." In order to censor the mail at the federal level, the law would have to be changed by Congress. President Jackson planned to accede to the South's demand and censor the antislavery movement through the power of the federal government. When the congress reconvened from summer recess, he would ask them to provide a law that gave him the power to regulate the mail.⁵⁵

Though the postal campaign did not convince many southern planters to give up slavery, the abolitionists did make one important gain from mailing their tracts to the South. While many unionists believed the issue of black enslavement in the United States of America should be left to individual states, those who opposed slavery often used the founding documents of the United States to nationalize the issue, at least for a short period of time before the two-party system attempted to remove it from national conversation. In an open letter from the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, the group explained, "We have said, in the words of the Declaration of Independence, that 'all men are created equal,' and that liberty is an unalienable gift of God to every man. We know of no clause in the constitution, which forbids our saying this."⁵⁶

Furthermore, just as free speech laws protected David Walker in Boston, the antislavery society insisted that the Bill of Rights protected antislavery speech at the

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 48: 457.

national level, even if some accused them of fomenting insurrection. The abolitionists argued, "It is said that the constitution of the United States forbids our acting, in any way, on this subject. Admit, for a moment, that slavery is, as is so confidently asserted, *guaranteed* by the constitution; is not the liberty of speech and of the press also explicitly guaranteed?" Mirroring the *Charleston Mercury*, the group's letter asked, "[I]f it be found that they cannot co-exist, the question is before the country—which of them is best worth preserving?" The members of both the antislavery and proslavery movements admitted in the abstract that they believed free speech and slavery—or at least for slaveholders, a secure slave population—could not exist in harmony. People, however, do not live in abstractions alone, and the United States Congress became tasked with a tedious balancing act.⁵⁷

President Jackson forced Congress to act when in his seventh annual message to Congress he wrote, "I invite your attention to the painful excitement produced in the South by attempts to circulate through the mails inflammatory appeals addressed to the passions of the slaves, in prints, and in various sorts of publications, calculated to stimulate them to insurrection and to produce all the horrors of servile war." The president took the opportunity to regain some of the loyalty of southerners that he may have lost because of the Nullification Crisis and postured himself, and his party, as defenders of southern slavery against abolitionist intent to incite black rebellion.⁵⁸

After giving his respect to "the state authorities to whom it properly belongs" for

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* vol. IV (New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1897): 1394-1395. The best description of the debate in Congress over the abolitionist postal campaign is still Savage, "Abolitionist Literature in the Mails, 1835-1836," 169-184.

censoring the antislavery tracts, Jackson continued, "it is nevertheless proper for Congress to take such measures as will prevent the Post Office Department, which was designed to foster an amicable intercourse between all the members of the Confederacy from being used as an instrument of an opposite character." The president asked Congress to pass "a law as will prohibit under severe penalties the circulation in the Southern states through the mails of incendiary publications intended to instigate the slaves to insurrection." In a choice between free speech and slavery, as posed by both members of the anti- and proslavery sides of the debate, Old Hickory chose to protect the latter.⁵⁹

The Senate moved first. John C. Calhoun led the way in trying to develop the upper chamber of Congress's response to the president's call for action against the antislavery tracts being sent to the slave states. The South Carolina senator asked that a special committee be formed to write Jackson's requested regulation of the mail. Despite some objection—for instance, from Senator Felix Grundy, a Tennessean who served as chairman of the Senate's Post Office and Post Roads Committee—his colleagues granted Calhoun's request and created a group of four southerners and one northerner in charge of writing legislation regarding "incendiary pamphlets." The South Carolinian served as the committee's chairman.⁶⁰

Calhoun's insistence on forming a special committee stemmed from two concerns. Firstly, because only one southerner sat on the ordinary group designated to form policy regarding the post office and the South Carolinian did not believe that President Jackson

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *Register of the Debates*, 24 Cong. 1 sess., 26-34; Savage, "Abolitionist Literature in the Mails," 171-172.

had the influence to properly convince northerners to protect slavery in an appropriate fashion. Secondly, the South Carolinian worried that the president and his party might take the opportunity granted by the controversy to extend his presidential power. Furthermore, the leading nullifier had been put into a precarious situation by the president. Calhoun still intended to offer a state's rights proposal that could protect southern slavery without empowering the federal government—something that clashed with newer proslavery ideas developing back home that argued the best way to ensure slavery would never be threatened by the federal government was wield its national power.⁶¹

Calhoun's committee reported its findings a few months later to the Senate. However, its concluding report and suggested bill had the oddity of not being endorsed in the whole by the majority of its members. Only Calhoun and the senator from North Carolina, Willie Person Magnum, completely supported the bill the committee submitted, while the other three members took issue with portions of the proposal. However, Calhoun read the committee's long report on the senate floor and explained that they "fully [concurred] with the president as to the character and tendency of the papers which have been attempted to be circulated in the south." Despite their agreement on the problem, the chairman continued, "But, while [the committee members] agree with the president as to the evil and its highly dangerous tendency, and the necessity of arresting it, they have not been able to assent to the measure of redress which he recommends," mainly that Congress should regulate the mail. Agreement over how to treat the topic of

⁶¹ Ibid.

slavery in the Senate would be hard to find.⁶²

John C. Calhoun managed to provide a state's rights rationale for not censoring the antislavery movement through the national government, as Jackson had proposed. The special committee had concluded, "that congress has not the power to pass such a law; that it would be a violation of the most sacred provisions of the constitution, and subversive of reserved powers essential to the preservation of the domestic institutions of the slaveholding states." The report also cited the first amendment as a reason that a law censoring the mail might be unconstitutional. However, the reasoning did not come from infringement on the free speech of antislavery American citizens; instead, the old nullifier argued, the first amendment prevented the federal government from having power to control the post office. This convoluted justification enabled Calhoun to attack Jackson's assertion of power without directly protecting the free speech rights of abolitionists.⁶³

Despite these concerns, though, the special committee did offer legislation to stifle the antislavery movement's use of the mail as a tool to spread their message to the South. The proposed bill essentially made it unlawful for a postmaster to put any publication that criticized slavery into the mail if the law of its destination deemed it incendiary and a threat to the safety of the slave system. It gave the postmaster general the authority to dismiss any deputy who violated the law and forced his deputies to know the laws of every destination where the mail they were asked to send might be circulated. Finally, it sanctioned the postmaster to destroy any pamphlet deemed incendiary if those who attempted to mail the tracts did not retrieve them. Following Amos Kendall's

⁶² *Niles' Weekly Register*, 49: 408.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

approach, the law submitted by Calhoun's committee empowered postmasters to judge what was and was not inappropriate to be sent via the postal service, making them the agents of censorship for slaveholders. Calhoun argued that instead of giving power directly to the federal government, his bill used national powers to reinforce state laws.⁶⁴

The Senate debated the committee's bill for months. Many did not see much of a difference between Calhoun and President Jackson's proposals, and therefore discussion focused on the merits and effectiveness of Calhoun's bill. The debate did not have a sectional tendency; northerners offered their approbation while senators from slave states—though none from the lower South—gave their disapproval. Support for the possible law focused mostly on the reasoning of President Jackson—national security trumped free speech. The president's party men in the senate took up his cause to defend slavery through the federal government and shore up the Democratic Party in the South for the upcoming presidential election.⁶⁵

A loyal deputy of the Jackson political machine, future president and senator from Pennsylvania James Buchanan, parroted Old Hickory when he defended his decision in favor of the bill and urged his colleagues to do the same. He told his fellow senators that he believed the law to be "absolutely necessary" in order to protect the South from "servile insurrection." Buchanan insisted that the security of the nation rested on the

⁶⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 24 Cong. 1 sess., 165.

⁶⁵ John C. Calhoun, bitter about losing his chance at the presidency, understood that a major motivation for Jackson's actions against the abolitionists came from him wanting to help Martin Van Buren win the presidency in 1836. When it became apparent the bill would not pass and in order to try and hurt the Vice President's electoral chances, Calhoun manufactured a tie on a test vote, in this case regarding the engrossment of the bill, forcing Van Buren to vote against the bill, and for the South Carolinian, against the South, or in favor of the proposal, and therefore possibly undermining support in the North. The Vice President voted in favor of the South and eventually the presidency, winning the majority of the northern vote. Calhoun underestimated the northern loyalty to slavery. For a more technical discussion of this see Savage, "Abolitionist Literature in the Mails," 180-181.

stifling of the abolitionists. He admitted that "unless in extreme cases, where the safety of the Republic was involved, we should never exercise this power of discrimination between what papers should and should not be circulated through the mail." Senator Buchanan added, "The Constitution, however, has conferred upon us this general power, probably for the very purpose of meeting these extreme cases, and it is one which, from its delicate nature, we shall not be likely to abuse." Ordinary citizens who wrote ordinary publications did have to fear the federal government squelching their speech. Fanatical abolitionism, on the other hand, threatened the nation and must be stopped. Just as with the Haitian Revolution and suppression of black sailors after Denmark Vesey's alleged plot, extraordinary measures needed to be taken. The security of slavery and the safety of the nation had become entwined.⁶⁶

Four objections arose in the Senate against the proposed federal regulations of antislavery tracts in the mail. Firstly, some southerners worried that using federal authority to censor their publications would lead to abolitionists being viewed by parts of the country as martyrs, hence working against the protection of slavery in the long run. Secondly, senators from both free and slave states believed the bill to be unconstitutional. Thirdly, by creating what historian Merrill Peterson has called the doctrine of "federal reinforcement," the law gave so much authority to the states that there would be no constitutional limits to government power at the federal level because it allowed the Tenth Amendment to make the rest of the Bill of Rights moot. Finally, Calhoun's proposal, despite his objections otherwise, made slavery a national issue and the federal government an ally to its protection against those who legally had the right to criticize it.

⁶⁶ *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24 Cong. 1 sess., 454.

It increased the federal relationship to slavery from protecting slaveholders from an insurrection and helping them in recovering runaway slaves, to actively participating in squelching criticism of slavery. The last three reasons served as the major indictments against Calhoun's bill.⁶⁷

Senators from both the North and the South attacked the bill. John Davis, the senator from Massachusetts, vehemently argued that Calhoun's proposal violated the First Amendment, which for many of his colleagues seemed obvious. However, the most effective reply to Calhoun came from Henry Clay. While Buchanan argued that the president's message had received praise across the nation, Clay said otherwise. Americans, he insisted, did not support government intervention in circulating newspapers. The Kentuckian opposed the bill because "it was unconstitutional; and, if not so, that it contained a principle of a most dangerous and alarming character" due to the power it gave the federal government. Delivering tracts to the addressed postal office did not threaten slavery, he maintained, because local law dealt with them once they arrived. The Great Compromiser argued that if state laws could regulate how mail would be circulated, they could also eventually use the same premise to attack antislavery speech in the North directly. Under the principles proposed in the bill, state laws trumped federal laws; therefore, local legislatures that passed the most draconian regulations would steer the nation's legal system. It opened the door for government dictated by the most radical activists, whether proslavery or antislavery.⁶⁸

Daniel Webster also gave a stirring defense of the freedom of the press.

⁶⁷ *Register of the Debates*, 24 Cong. 1 sess., 1136-1156; Merrill D. Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987): 258-259.

⁶⁸ *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24 Cong. 1 sess., 455.

However, after the famous senator and orator from Massachusetts showed how the bill put too much of an onus on deputy postmasters to know each state's specific laws regarding speech and criticized its vagueness for making it impossible to know what was and was not "incendiary," Felix Grundy attempted to save the bill. The Tennessean worked to simplify the law by placing the onus of local law on the postmaster who received the tracts instead putting the responsibility on those who sent them. He hoped that this clarification would bolster the constitutionality of the bill. However, upon the final vote, the Senate rejected Calhoun's attempt to regulate the circulation of antislavery newspapers through the mail by a vote of twenty-four to nineteen. The federal government would not define incendiaries at the national level.⁶⁹

The debate in the Senate reflected the discourse between Thomas Ritchie and the Charleston *Mercury*. While every southerner from the Deep South voted in favor of the bill, the senators from the Upper South split their votes, which proved decisive. Six votes against the bill came from the representatives of Kentucky, Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware. Had three senators who voted against the bill instead voted in favor of it, the new regulations regarding the postal service would have passed the upper chamber of Congress. Many of the senators from the Upper South followed Ritchie's idea that the Constitution already protected slavery. Furthermore, the vote also showed that slavery did have support in the North. Though resulting from party loyalty as much as their favor of slavery, four northern senators favored the draconian bill that expanded federal protection of slavery. In the lower chamber of Congress, things happened differently.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 24 Cong. 1 sess., 539; Savage, "Abolitionist Literature in the Mails," 179-180.

⁷⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 539.

The House of Representatives and the United States Senate operated differently. Whereas in the Senate one person, such as John C. Calhoun, could spark a heated debate the Speaker of the House had more control over who could propose a bill or address the chamber. After President Jackson's annual address, the House of Representatives had very little debate over the issue and chose to stay out of the controversy altogether. The members of the lower chamber refused to create a special committee to write a bill because its members believed the issue did not need special attention. The House of Representatives decided to follow Ritchie and Clay's beliefs about the postal campaign—the Constitution protected slavery *and* the freedom of the press.⁷¹

After debating issues regarding the postal service in ordinary fashion, the House of Representatives passed a bill made up of forty-six sections that organized the United States postal service. Only one made reference to the antislavery pamphlets. The section forbade anyone working for the post office from detaining "any letter, package, pamphlet, or newspaper with intent to prevent the arrival and delivery" and punished "any postmaster" who might "give a preference to any letter, package, pamphlet, or newspaper over another" with a fine and possible imprisonment. The House of Representatives passed the bill in June 1836 and the Senate assented to it a few weeks later, therefore sending the bill to be signed into law by the president. Despite the fact that the law would most likely be disobeyed, Congress had rejected Andrew Jackson and John C. Calhoun's attempt to nationalize the protection of southern slaveholding against the

⁷¹ Savage, "Abolitionist Literature in the Mails," 170.

antislavery movement.⁷²

The postal campaign showed the divide, both regionally and nationally, over how to treat slavery under the Constitution. Moderates like Thomas Ritchie won the day when Congress eventually determined that the federal government should stay out of actively supporting slavery against a mobilizing abolitionist campaign. By following a strict version of the Constitution, which granted very little authority to protect slavery outright, the United States could protect both free speech and the interest and safety of slaveholders. Other southerners were pleased that a precedent had not been set for federal action that could eventually be used against slavery.

Furthermore, the negative response by a large portion of northerners to antislavery tracts being sent southward showed slaveholders that, as had been argued in the *Enquirer*, many in the North did condemn the principles of abolitionism, even if the debate in the Senate showed the limits of their support for slavery. Antiblack sentiment and concerns about insurrection gave northerners without strong feelings about slavery a reason to chastise those who wanted it to end and gave pause to some who might consider immediate emancipation. The middle ground in the North regarding the political issue of slavery remained in existence because the postal campaign connected ending slavery with helping the enslaved while both sides—as Ritchie called them, the Factionous and Fanatics—had little authority under the Constitution to promote what they believed. During the late 1830s and 1840s, though, that would change.

⁷² *List of Post Offices in the United States, with the Names of Postmasters on the 1st of April 1859; Also the Laws and Regulations of the Post Office Department* (Washington: John C. Rives, 1859): 32; Savage, "Abolitionist Literature in the Mails," 183.

British emancipation both frightened slaveholders and empowered a new outspoken proslavery movement. With the freeing of the enslaved in the West Indies, the world seemed more dangerous for the planters living in the American South. Instead of being firmly ensconced in the middle of Atlantic slavery, after emancipation in the West Indies by England, southerners found themselves on its eastern edge. Rather than having fellow Caribbean planters willing to accept rebellious slaves from the United States, acting as a possible safety valve, southern slaveholders saw hundreds of thousands of free blacks that they believed sought revenge against everyone who held slaves. Most importantly, though, losing England as a justification for the morality of the South's labor system undermined a key rationale for theorists who defended slavery. However, it also opened a new avenue for the proslavery movement and created an issue that would dominate American politics for a decade.

During the discussion of British emancipation and the debate over the postal campaign, the proslavery movement backed away from the limited government approach to defending slavery. The rise of the abolitionists in the House of Commons made them believe that people who thought the Constitution alone could protect slavery had been mistaken. For the members of the proslavery movement, the end of slavery in the British West Indies showed that a majority in the legislature acted as the judge of constitutional limits. For the proslavery movement the documents that people like Thomas Ritchie believed made the United States exceptional, and therefore capable of protecting slavery *and* individual rights such as free speech, had in fact not created a government much different from the one their forefathers had revolted against during the American Revolution.

While ardent defenders of slavery had criticized planters who asked for federal legislation against David Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* roughly five years before, the size of the abolitionist postal campaign, along with the example of West Indian emancipation, made the former nullifiers reject the radical state's rights position that chastised federal involvement in anything remotely respecting slavery to a more active approach. For them, if slavery were to be protected, the federal government would have to directly put in safeguards instead of solely reacting against antislavery legislation as they had done with the Missouri Compromise. The Senate vote on regulating the mail showed that a majority could be found if members from the border South voted the proslavery line. The task of the proslavery movement would be to find an issue that northerners and people in the Upper South, filled with antipathy towards blacks, could support.

Hostility towards Great Britain seemed to be the answer. Though the emancipation of the West Indies by England undermined the moral argument for slavery, having a nation the United States had already fought two wars with would help politically during the decade after the postal campaign. England, like Haiti during the Adams and Jefferson administration, could be viewed as an enemy who threatened the United States as a whole, thus broadening America's proslavery foreign policy to include nations that opposed slavery. Though being hemmed in by free soil on three sides of their border gave planters concern, it also created political issues on which to build the proslavery movement. During the rest of the decade and continuing in the 1840s, the strident defenders of slavery would move past just defending slavery through state's rights ideology or using their extra power in Congress to stifle antislavery rhetoric. Instead, they

actively used the federal government to promote slavery while rallying national support to their side by making claims about national security against foreign abolitionism and the fear of insurrection.

Chapter Four

The Growing Proslavery Fear of the Abolitionist Power

San Domingo, so often referred to, and so little understood, is not a case where black heroes rose and acquired Government...Do you wonder, then, that we pause when we see this studied tendency to convert the Government into a military despotism? Do you wonder that we question the right of the President to send troops to execute the laws whenever he pleases, when we remember the conduct of France, and that those troops were sent with like avowal, and quartered on plantations, and planters arrested for treason...and brought away that insurrection might be instigated among their slaves?

-Jefferson Davis, January 10, 1861¹

In the immediate aftermath of the abolitionist postal campaign in the summer of 1835, proslavery forces went on an offensive that changed the nature of the debate over slavery in the United States. After years of responding to antislavery attacks against their system of labor in a defensive manner, southern planters turned to actively promoting slavery through the expansion of federal power. The speeches and writings of two southern politicians in particular during this period, George McDuffie and James Henry Hammond, typify this transition of the South from the belief that the federal government should have a laissez faire relationship to slavery in the states to a belief that it should take a more active role in support of slavery. While this aggressive new proslavery movement rippled across the South, however, it also made waves in the North. In January 1836 Charles Sumner, then a lecturer at Harvard Law School who would later become a lightning rod for the antislavery movement, noted that the actions of the proslavery movement three months prior had "generally caused many to think favorably of

¹ Jefferson Davis, "Remarks on the Special Message on Affairs in South Carolina. Jan. 10, 1861" in Jon L. Wakelyn, ed., *Southern Pamphlets on Secession, November 1860-April 1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996): 139.

immediate emancipation who never before inclined to it."² As white southerners became more and more unyielding about the federal government's responsibility for defending slavery, northerners who had previously resisted the calls of the antislavery movement now joined with it in opposition to a new, more dangerous proslavery doctrine.

In politics, early firebrands often become forgotten while the feelings they inspired remain for years, if not decades. South Carolina, as it had during the Nullification Crisis and would during the months leading to the Civil War, served as a base from which ardent proslavery ideas developed and then spread to the national level. Two major speeches—one by governor McDuffie, the other by freshman congressman Hammond—especially resonated throughout the United States. The first emerged at the same time that John C. Calhoun—South Carolina's leading politician—tried to establish new regulations against antislavery pamphlets being sent through the mail. In response to the growing strength of those who opposed slavery, South Carolina's governor, George McDuffie, the so-called "orator of nullification," addressed the question of slavery in his annual report to the state legislature. His fiery speech was published in both northern and southern periodicals as he attempted to draw a line in the sand regarding the acceptance of slavery in the United States of America while also working to paint the antislavery movement as a domestic threat to the security of the union at large.³

² Charles Sumner to Francis Lieber, January 9, 1836 in *Memoirs and Letters of Charles Sumner* ed. Edward L. Pierce (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1877): 1: 173; Anne-Marie Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner and the Legacy of the American Enlightenment, 1811-1851* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001): 48-87.

³ "Governor McDuffie's Message on the Slavery Question, 1835" in *American History Leaflets Colonial and Constitutional* eds. Albert Bushnell Hart and Edward Channing (New York: A. Lovell & Company, 1893); *Farmer's Register* III (1836): 571-574; *The Liberator*, December 12, 1835.

The governor launched his broadside against abolitionism because he believed that those who wanted to end slavery had tried to infiltrate the South in order to undermine southern safety—and, therefore, American security. McDuffie called abolitionists "wicked monsters and deluded fanatics" who masked their true beliefs with religion in order to trick Americans in the North into following them towards destroying the American republic that was dedicated to the protection of white liberty. Whiteness in the United States, not just slavery, was what the "fanatics" of the North wanted to disrupt. They wanted, he insisted, to "fulfill the fiend-like errand of mingling the blood of the master and the slave, to whose fate they are equally indifferent, with the smoldering of our peaceful dwellings." The antislavery societies that had sprung up during the early years of the 1830s, the governor continued, represented a real threat to the safety of every white family who lived within the borders of the South. For McDuffie, antislavery northerners were almost demonically possessed and clung to an "unholy creed." They would do anything to achieve their goals. "Murder itself," McDuffie argued, became "a labor of love and charity" for those who wanted to end the enslavement of blacks in the United States.⁴

The South Carolina governor echoed the sentiments of Robert Turnbull a decade earlier. He adamantly urged southern slaveholders to remember world history when they anticipated the future of slavery in their own country. The push for the emancipation of the enslaved would only gain strength if white southerners did not fight back, he proclaimed, and southern slaveholders did not need to look far to see his point—the Caribbean was close by. He stated, "The experience of both France and Great Britain

⁴ "Governor McDuffie's Message on the Slavery Question, 1835," 2.

fearfully instruct us, from what small and contemptible beginnings, this *amis des noirs* philanthropy may rise to gigantic power."⁵ The acknowledgement of the history of other systems of slavery emboldened American planters to take action.

While urging those listening to him to consider the history of other nations, the governor furthered his defense of slavery by calling abolitionism un-American. Foreign elements, he argued, hoped to influence the North and propel anti-Americanism among the abolitionists in the United States. He declared, "The crime which these foreign incendiaries have committed against the peace of the States, is one of the highest grade known to human laws," referring to the fears of insurrection and the British slight against the South Carolinian Negro Seaman's Act.⁶ All Americans—not just slaveholders—would need to be vigilant and stand guard against a foreign invasion of antislavery pressure on the North that threatened to topple the system of slavery and weaken the United States in general.

After voicing these warnings, Governor McDuffie offered a proposal to the white South. He insisted that the State of South Carolina through its local government set an example in resisting the antislavery movement. He hoped to inspire other slave states—and slavery's northern allies—to defend slavery against its foes that wanted not only to end slavery but to destroy the white population of the South, thus shredding the very fabric of the Union. He told the legislature, "It is my deliberate opinion, that the laws of

⁵ Ibid., 2-3. The *Société des amis des Noirs* or *Amis des noirs* was a French abolitionist group created in the late 18th century that slaveholders blamed for the insurrection that helped spark the Haitian Revolution. See Daniel P. Resnick, "The Societe des Amis des Noirs and the Abolition of Slavery" *French Historical Studies* 7 (Autumn, 1972): 558-569.

⁶ "Governor McDuffie's Message on the Slavery Question," 1835," 2.

every community should punish this species of interference by death" and that the state should consider the members of the antislavery movement "enemies of the human race." Furthermore, he urged the assembled state representatives to move quickly, saying, "I trust the Legislature will not adjourn till it discharges this high duty of patriotism."⁷

According to the governor, slaveholders needed to answer the call at home first, but not stop there. The times necessitated that they should proceed further by taking their proslavery message to a national audience and seeking stronger restraints against abolitionism by using the power of the federal level against the antislavery movement in the North. McDuffie pointed to the fact that "any laws which may be enacted by the authority of this State" did not have the power to "punish or repress offences committed within its limit." This posed a problem for those who wanted to safeguard slavery. In order to ensure that the history of the French and English West Indies did not repeat itself in the United States, planters needed to do more outside of their respective states and local authorities. "If we go no farther" than passing laws that repress the antislavery movement in slave states alone, the governor alleged, "we had as well do nothing" because "the outrages against the peace and safety of the State are perpetrated in other communities" in which southern laws did not apply.⁸

Through this speech the governor acknowledged that slavery was indeed dangerous to those who held millions of blacks in bondage. While northerners refused to suppress the antislavery movement, "the authors of all this mischief" continued to "concoct their schemes, plant their batteries, and hurl their fiery missiles among us,

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ Ibid., 3-4.

aimed at that mighty magazine of combustible matter, the explosion of which would lay the State in ruins." By claiming that it would be the state that would be attacked instead of slavery or slaveholders, the governor included all whites, not just those who owned slaves.⁹ Even the most vociferous defenders of slavery, those who argued that the institution was beneficial to whites and blacks alike, had to acknowledge that the kindling that was America's enslaved population could alight into a blazing fire like the Haitian Revolution, which would sweep every white person up in its destruction.

To prevent that bloody Caribbean event from reoccurring in mainland America, McDuffie believed the proslavery movement needed to become nationalized, thereby completely securing itself against its hated enemies who wanted to dismantle American slavery once and for all. He stated that it was the South's "imperious duty" to "demand of our sovereign associates the condign punishment of those enemies of our peace, who avail themselves of the sanctuaries of their respective jurisdictions to carry on schemes of incendiary hostility against the institutions, the safety, and the existence of the State." Following his demands for more concessions from the free states to pursue the censorship of the antislavery movement, he further defended slavery in the South by tapping into the deep reservoir of proslavery thought that had been created throughout the previous decades. Echoing the sentiments of "Pliny," who had just a few years before completed a comparative study of the laboring classes of nations that had already ended slavery, the South Carolinian relied on religious interpretation and political theory to defend the peculiar institution. Because slavery was a good thing, according to southern planters, slaveholders must ask for federal protection. They had to validate their intellectual

⁹ Ibid.

justification for the institution's existence within the United States with federal law while keeping it safe from those who wished to do it harm.¹⁰

First, however, McDuffie needed to gain support from outside his state. He had to convince Americans, North and South, that the antislavery movement would hurt the entire nation if it was left unopposed. As part of his defense of slavery against the antislavery movement, he portrayed the slaveholders of the South as the defenders of a white American republic, an issue that resonated with the defenders of slavery until the Civil War. Those who wanted to end slavery, he declared, also wanted to end the political power of whites in the United States. He contended that the "state of political amalgamation and conflict, which the Abolitionists evidently aim to produce, would be the most horrible condition imaginable, and would furnish Dante or Milton with the type for another chapter illustrating the horrors of the infernal regions."¹¹ The difference between social amalgamation in the South and "political amalgamation" with North had to be sharply drawn for those living in antebellum America. The mixing of the races in the South would have little implication for many northerners who lived hundreds of miles away from the southern population and may have had little contact with blacks generally. However, "political amalgamation" inherently affected northerners who shared the same federal government with those in the South by granting blacks the power to win elections and head to Washington authorized to vote on every bill that passed through Congress. Instead of creating Heaven on Earth, the governor maintained mockingly, the religious antislavery movement portended to summon Hell.

¹⁰ Ibid., 4-10.

¹¹ Ibid., 6.

In the eyes of many planters, action needed to be taken while time allowed and the antislavery movement was still weak. McDuffie wanted the slave state assemblies, especially South Carolina's, to issue a "disclaimer" that the United States Congress could not "interfere in any manner" with slavery. He believed "Though the right to emancipate our slaves by coercive legislation has been very generally disclaimed by popular assemblages in the non-slaveholding States, it is nevertheless important that each of those States" be given such a notice "as a permanent record for our future security." The northern allies of slavery would offer their support if proslavery southerners pushed hard enough, the South Carolinian reasoned to his state's legislators. He ended his speech by saying, "The liberal, enlightened and magnanimous conduct of the people in many portions of the non-slaveholding States forbids us to anticipate a refusal on the part of those States to fulfill these high obligations of national faith and duty." The fate of the union and security of the nation rested upon the North's protection of the South from antislavery interference with the South's black labor force, the governor insisted. If slavery ended, "ten millions of poor white people would be reduced to destitution, pauperism and starvation."¹² McDuffie's powerful speech resonated with southerners. In the coming weeks another South Carolinian, a man new to the House of Representatives who wanted to make a name for himself among the slaveholding class, would put his ideas into action.

A few months prior to his proslavery address to the state legislature, Governor McDuffie visited the plantation home of one of South Carolina's newly elected members of Congress, James Henry Hammond, for a lively conversation about the future of

¹² Ibid., 11-13.

American slavery. Hammond was a man who desperately wanted to be considered a giant among his peers in the Palmetto State's planter elite. During the Nullification Crisis, Hammond gained fame as an ardent supporter of Calhoun, and he defended slavery whole-heartedly during discussions over the emancipation of the West Indies and the abolitionist postal campaign. In the heated summer of 1835, Hammond wrote the editor of the New York *Evening Star*, demanding that free-state governments take action against the abolitionists by silencing them with "Terror" and "Death." To show the newspaper editor that he was serious, the congressmen-elect compared southern slavery to the recently abolished slavery of the West Indies. He wrote, "The Northern Fanatics must not expect to find in us the unrepresented colonial subjects of an arrogant monarchy."¹³ American slaveholders, unlike their Caribbean counterparts, aimed to fight back against those who wanted to interrupt the institution of slavery established below the Mason-Dixon Line. The United States of America would not act like England.

Having studied Thomas Roderick Dew's defense of slavery in the aftermath of Nat Turner's insurrection, Hammond believed, like his governor, that something needed to be done to strengthen slavery in the United States. Slaveholding southerners, he contended, would stand against the abolitionist threat to the South. In that cause he had no doubt. However, he believed that planters could no longer be only "abject apologists of slavery." Instead, they needed to "openly, manfully erect and roll back the misdirected tide of public sentiment" and establish a "ground selected for battle as will cover us best

¹³ Hammond to M. M. Noah, August 19, 1835 in the Papers of James Henry Hammond (Library of Congress); Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

both behind and before and make the triumph as bloodless as possible."¹⁴ Washington, D.C. and the halls of Congress offered an arena in which proslavery advocates could take a stand against the growing antislavery movement of the North and the world, as it moved towards implementing plans for the emancipation of the enslaved. Like the postal campaign just months before, the battle between proslavery and antislavery forces would revolve around the concept of free speech in the United States.

The right to petition the government for grievances in America long antedated the Bill of Rights or the Constitution. The first recorded act of the colonial government of Connecticut regarded a grievance between neighbors, and throughout the colonial period the reception of petitions from the populace originated more bills in America than any other source of legislation. However, when Hammond arrived in Washington in December 1835, he would forever change the meaning of the right "to petition the Government for a redress of grievances" in the United States. Understanding the significance of his actions, the South Carolinian believed he could make a name for himself within the proslavery movement by challenging centuries of precedent in the English-speaking world as he worked to defend slavery against the growing tide of antislavery sentiment in the northern states.¹⁵

For over forty years the House of Representatives dealt with petitions in a particular fashion: one day every week, while in session, the House received petitions and

¹⁴ James Henry Hammond to I. W. Hayne, September 21, 1835; James Henry Hammond to Dear Sir, September 4, 1835 both in the Papers of James Henry Hammond (Library of Congress); Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South*, 157-164.

¹⁵ Stephen A. Higginson, "A Short History of the Right to Petition Government for the Redress of Grievances," *The Yale Law Journal* 96 (Nov., 1986): 142-166; Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South*, 156-164.

sent them, based on subject, to the committee that acted on the concerns the petition expressed. Sometimes this arrangement varied; most of the time it did not. On December 16, 1835, a little over a week after the first session of the new Congress convened, four congressmen presented petitions from their constituencies. Only one, though, sparked a major discussion on the House floor. John Fairfield from Maine and one of 155 freshmen members of Congress, "presented the petition of one hundred and seventy-two ladies residing in his district, praying for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia." What followed would change the practice of petitioning forever in the United States of America.

Usually, the submission of petitions, sometimes also referred to as memorials, by congressmen created very little discussion on the House floor, but this particular petition brought about a different reaction. Fairfield asked that his submission be moved to the Committee on the District of Columbia. However, before a motion to lay the bill on the table of the committee could proceed—thus dismissing it from further discussion—the antislavery representative from Vermont, William Slade, asked that the memorial be printed and distributed to every congressman. He believed that the issue of slavery and the slave trade in Washington, D.C. could be separated from the abolition of slavery in the South. He insisted that his colleagues consider the memorial because the Constitution allowed for Congress to dictate the laws of the capital, and therefore slavery within the Washington limits, despite restrictions regarding slavery in the states. However, after a short discussion about whether the merits of slavery in the nation's capital could be debated, an overwhelming majority, 180 in favor and only 31 against, chose to ignore Slade's request and table the antislavery petition. Slavery was not to be discussed on the

House floor. Immediately after the vote, various congressmen presented nine more memorials without note.¹⁶

Two days after Fairfield presented his petition to Congress, another congressman, this time from Massachusetts, asked the lower chamber to receive a request to end slavery in the District of Columbia. This time the small sparks turned into a flickering flame as James Henry Hammond seized his opportunity to strike against the antislavery movement and assert congressional power in favor of slaveholders and southern slavery. The South Carolinian moved that the House formally not accept antislavery petitions, rather than simply receiving and ignoring them. He argued, "The large majority by which the House had rejected a similar petition a few days had been very gratifying to him, and no doubt would be very gratifying to the South." Congress, he proclaimed, should show the antislavery movement in the North that it had no jurisdiction in regards to slavery at the national level, even if the Constitution authorized Congress to pass laws regarding the nation's capital. Hammond changed the game by asserting a proslavery definition of the First Amendment. Speaker of the House and future president James K. Polk—stunned by the actions of the South Carolinian—tried to resolve the crisis without starting a fight over slavery in the halls of the Capitol, a conflict that many of Hammond's congressional colleagues in the North and South, according to Polk, "desired to avoid."¹⁷ As the House fell into disorder while debating the validity of Hammond's request, Polk

¹⁶ Ibid. The debate over the "gag rule" has been written about by many historians with various interpretations of why it happened. For examples see: William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: The Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996): 197-214; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854 volume 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990): 308-336; Susan Wyly-Jones, "The Antiabolitionist Panic: Slavery, Abolition, and Politics in the U.S. South, 1835-1844" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2000):209-288.

¹⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 27-35.

failed to stifle the issue. Slavery again became part of the discussion among the representatives of the lower chamber of Congress.

In his initial request that the House refuse antislavery memorials, Hammond stated he could not "sit there and see the rights of the southern people assaulted by the ignorant fanatics from whom the memorials" came to Washington.¹⁸ His motion did not pertain to constitutional rights, but instead to "sacred" ones, which went beyond the rules of the Constitution. For some of Hammond's southern colleagues, though, the issue offered them a way to defend their region's honor while at the same time boosting the protection of slavery overall.

When a representative from New York implied that Hammond's actions proved the existence of "fanatics and incendiaries at the South, as well as the North, who hoped to profit by agitation" of the subject of slavery, one of Hammond's fellow South Carolinians stood up and vehemently defended him. Francis Pickens said, "We desire [a discussion about slavery] because we believe we have been foully slandered before the world; and I stand here prepared, at any time...to vindicate the institutions of the people I have the honor in part to represent, from the foul aspersion and calumny thrown upon them."¹⁹ As Christmas approached, some in the House of Representatives hoped the holiday recess might serve to temper the debate over the petitions. They would be greatly disappointed. Members of the proslavery movement had more motivation than hurt

¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹ Ibid., 31-33. Hammond's reaction to abolitionism and his feeling of being insulted stemmed directly from the culture that he lived in. For a look at the numerous ways that a southern slaveholder could feel insulted by someone else, see: Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing As A Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, The Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996): 51-86; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982): 43.

feelings for defending slavery in the South.

At the beginning of 1836, while the Senate debated the application of the principle of free speech with regard to unsolicited antislavery publications sent slaveholders, the House of Representatives became further consumed with the limits of the First Amendment's guarantee of the right to petition Congress. Though both authors were from South Carolina, Calhoun and Hammond differed on their understanding of the usefulness of the federal government. While Calhoun hoped to limit federal power over regulating the mail by making postal delivery contingent on state laws, Hammond took a more straightforward approach: Congress should not accept the antislavery memorials because they jeopardized the safety of the South—and thus the nation. The safety of slavery was a national issue for Hammond. Much of the debate in the House of Representatives revolved around security and the dangers antislavery posed to all white southerners, not the power of the federal government growing in power to the point in which it could end slavery, which Calhoun feared.

Hammond later admitted that he had acted impulsively when he first challenged the antislavery movement's right to petition Congress to regulate slavery in Washington, D.C. However, upon his return to Washington in January, he was ready to better explain the actions he had taken the month before. As Hammond's biographer Drew Gilpin Faust has described, the perfervid young defender of slavery wanted to "show that the most fundamental issue at hand was not the right of petition, but the South's right to survival." Roughly two weeks later, Hammond would get his chance. In a two-hour speech, the twenty-eight-year-old congressman who dreamed of achieving greatness made a case for the federal government's active protection of slavery. Congress' passive rejection of

abolitionism was no longer enough.²⁰

Hammond's speech on the House floor served as an announcement by the proslavery movement that its supporters would be willing to do battle in Congress against the growing antislavery movement of the North. Slaveholders had become convinced that northern antislavery activists wanted to gain power over the South's institution through Congress just as the abolitionists of England had come to power in Parliament. As Hammond had told the northern newspaper editor in his letter just eight months before, he and the rest of the proslavery movement planned to actively oppose the growth of antislavery and antislavery societies in the North with a vigor that surpassed their Caribbean counterparts' a decade prior. The South Carolinian did not disappoint his fellow members of the proslavery movement in his aggressive attacks against abolitionism in the United States.

The presumed grand conspiracy of abolitionism, similar to the one advanced in the Nero letter found after the Turner insurrection, seemed to be moving forward once again. Hammond began his speech by describing what could be called the "Abolitionist Power," a machination among northern abolitionists to slowly gain power and destroy slavery in the United States. He pointed to the petitioners as "persons who are pursuing a systematic plan of operation intended to subvert the institutions of the South, and which, if carried into effect, must desolate the fairest portion of America, and dissolve in blood the bonds of this confederacy."²¹ A worldwide scheme had been implemented to end slavery and create chaos among the plantation societies that relied on black enslavement.

²⁰ Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South*, 176.

²¹ *Register of the Debates*, 24th Cong., 1 sess., 2450.

Hammond warned the planters in the United States that North America would be the location for final battle between slaveholders and abolitionists.

Accepting the antislavery petitions, the South Carolina congressman argued, only helped to strengthen the efforts of the conspirators, allowing abolitionists to take control of the federal government and change the definition of constitutional authority regarding slavery. The petitions themselves, he insisted, served as evidence of the growing strength of the Abolitionist Power in the North. He asked Congress to consider the number of signatures on petitions against slavery. "These petitions are signed by between seven and eight thousand persons," Hammond fearfully pointed out. Furthermore, "some of them [signed] as representatives of large societies." Taken together, the southern planter stated, "some forty thousand persons petitioning Congress at this session" represented "no small evidence of the strength of the abolition party."²² Southerners and their allies in the North needed to be ready to fight back against an enemy that was growing stronger and more willing to pursue new ways to achieve their goals.

James Henry Hammond hoped to paint the antislavery movement as an inherently anti-Union domestic enemy of the United States by reading quotations he had gathered from antislavery newspapers that echoed the sentiments of William Lloyd Garrison's motto of no union with slaveholders. Following this iteration, he read aloud a letter he had received from a proslavery northerner from western New York who Hammond said was a "shrewd observer of events passing around him." The letter explained that some abolitionist organizations wanted to change the question from "that of emancipation of

²² Ibid.

the slave to that of the continuance of the Union."²³ The former nullifier, who often cried for disunion, argued that the nation was under a concerted attack by a fanatical organization that hoped to weaken bonds between the states in order to destroy the South and its slave system.

The writer from the North, moreover, warned Hammond that antislavery tracts had been circulated at prayer meetings, as abolitionists in the North labored "to unite her people against you." The movement hoped to achieve sectionalism because it would leave southern planters on their own. The South Carolinian used this letter to describe the real threat posed by the antislavery movement to the Union and to advise his fellow congressmen that a Haitian-style revolution could one day take place in the United States. He stated: "I endeavor to convince my neighbors that these pamphlets are false in every particular, and that if they join the cry of abolition, they must partake of the enormous sin of bringing on a civil war, of destroying our Union, and of causing the renewal of the horrors of St. Domingo."²⁴ Once again, the echoes of the Haitian Revolution sounded in the halls of the Capitol. If it could happen in the Caribbean—just a few hundred miles away from the South—the proslavery representative implied, it could happen in the United States. Hammond therefore hoped to tie the antislavery movement to the unraveling of national security.

The "gentleman" from New York ended his note to the congressman by telling the South Carolinian that "Congress will be the ultimate scene of the struggle." Hammond used the letter to justify to the proslavery coalition and their northern allies that the time

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 2453-2454.

had come to claim federal authority and protect slavery with the strength of the federal—not just local—government. When a New York congressman demanded the name of the author, Hammond replied, "I cannot give it. I will vouch for his character. But such is the state of society around him, I hear it would prove dangerous if not fatal to him, if I disclose his name."²⁵ Hammond thus described the North as a truly authoritarian society that would not hesitate to silence anyone who dared defend slavery.

Hammond continued his speech by listing three ways he believed slavery could be ended in the United States: "Through the medium of the slaveholder—or the Government—or the slaves themselves." He then explained his anticipation of the odds and feasibility of each contingency coming to pass. Hammond first examined the chance that slaveholders might decide, as some in Virginia had just a few years before, that the enslavement of blacks should be ended because of the inherent threat slaves posed to their masters, against whom they might rise up in arms. Slavery was safe when left alone, he contended, mirroring Thomas Roderick Dew's response to Nat Turner's rebellion in Virginia. "There may be nervous men and timid women," Hammond said, "whose imaginations are haunted with the unwonted fears, among us, as there are in all communities on earth; but in no part of the world have men of ordinary firmness less fear of danger from their operatives than we have."²⁶ Without antislavery interference, those held in bondage throughout the South would remain passive.

Furthermore, Hammond believed that moral suasion would have little effect on the planter class of the South, asserting, "In the whole history of the question of

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

emancipation, in Europe or America, I do not remember a dozen instances of masters freeing their slaves, at least during their lifetimes, from any qualms of conscience."²⁷ The South, according to Hammond, appeared committed to slavery in the face of the antislavery movement's moral accusations. "The abolitionist can appeal only to the hopes or fears or interest of the slaveholder, to induce him to emancipate his slaves," Hammond told his audience.²⁸ The antislavery calls for emancipation for moral reasons would fall on deaf ears in the South.

The moral suasion of abolitionists did not keep James Henry Hammond up at night because he believed that no slaveholder would ever willingly give up his chattel property due to conscientious objection. After all, most southern religious leaders had blessed the South's peculiar institution in one form or another. Richard Furman, for example, had told his southern flock after the 1820s Vesey scare that, "the right of holding slaves [was] clearly established in the Holy Scriptures." Moreover, after the abolitionist postal campaign, southern religious leaders took a more active approach in defending slavery from the pulpit, just as public servants such as Hammond had in the realm of politics.²⁹ Slavery appeared to be safe from the danger of moral suasion.

Next, Hammond challenged what he considered another part of the Abolition Power's history of success—English emancipation in the West Indies. He asked his fellow members of Congress to examine the "probability of success [that the

²⁷ Ibid., 2454-2455.

²⁸ Ibid., 2455.

²⁹ Richard Furman, *Rev. Dr. Richard Furman's exposition of the views of the Baptists relative to the coloured population of the United States: in a communication to the governor of South-Carolina*. (Charleston, 1823): 7, 13-19; Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*. (Cambridge University Press, 1993): 28-49.

abolitionists] can call upon the Government to emancipate our negroes." Hammond believed he needed to show why West Indian-style emancipation, which reimbursed slaveholders for freeing the enslaved, could never become a practical solution in the United States. He estimated the number of people held in slavery in the South to be about "2,300,000" and "their annual increase" to be "60,000," remarking that, "even the British Government did not dare to emancipate the slaves of its enslaved West India subjects without some compensation" though "they gave them about sixty per cent of their value." The United States, Hammond argued, would have to pay roughly four hundred dollars to free every enslaved man, woman, and child in America. The government money necessary for this undertaking, he calculated, "would amount to upwards of nine hundred millions," a sum of money nearly thirty-times the size of the entire federal budget.³⁰

Paying the former planters for emancipating the enslaved on their plantations would not be the only cost of emancipation, either. Though the South Carolinian did not mathematically tally the possible extra cost, he insisted that freed blacks could never live with their former masters; they would have to be sent away from the country of their birth. The government could never pay for this. The congressman ended his computation with a simple analysis that looked towards the future: "The value of their annual increase, alone, is twenty-four millions of dollars; so that to free them in one hundred years, without the expense of taking them from the country, would require an annual appropriation of between thirty-three and thirty-four millions of dollars." The idea of white Americans paying twice the cost of the Louisiana Purchase in order to free blacks,

³⁰ *Register of the Debates* 24 Cong. 1 sess., 2455; *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Bicentennial Edition, Part 2* (Washington DC: U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1975): 1104.

he concluded, was "physically impossible."³¹ The abolition of slavery as it took place in the English colonial holdings could never happen in the United States.

Another reason for the impossibility of compensated emancipation in the United States had nothing to do with economics. Rather, Hammond argued, "the moment this House undertakes to legislate upon this subject, it dissolves the Union." The South would never accept losing the battle to control the federal government. If such a thing were to happen, and the antislavery movement were to gain enough government power to actually attempt ending slavery, Hammond promised that he would "go home and preach, and if I can, to practice, disunion, and civil war if need be." His reasoning was plain: if the South and its slaveholding elite could no longer be protected, "a revolution must ensure, and this republic sink in blood."³²

Slaveholders throughout history typically did not like war because it often created the possibility of unrest within the slave population. However, radical members of the proslavery movement often talked about the chance of civil war occurring if antislavery politicians attempted to wield the strength against southern enslavement. Hammond's speech on the House floor therefore gives us early insights as to why southern slaveholders might risk a civil war by abandoning the Constitutional government rather than staying within the confines of a Union they perceived to be completely controlled by those who opposed slavery. There was, therefore, only one way that slavery might be ended in the United States—through slave insurrection, just as in the French colony of Saint Domingue four decades earlier.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Hammond believed abolitionists understood that insurrection offered the best way to end slavery in America, and he told Congress "the only remaining chance for the abolitionists to succeed in their nefarious schemes will be by appealing to the slaves themselves; and say what they will, this is the great object at which they aim." He argued to Congress that the aims of the antislavery societies of the North were clear: "all their meetings, publications, lectures, and missions" revolved around one goal, to "excite a servile insurrection" and to teach "the slave to cut his master's throat."³³ The antislavery movement, according to one of the most vocal members of the proslavery movement, did not want simply to end slavery but also to kill all those who owned slaves or lived in a slaveholding community.

The South Carolinian nevertheless believed the Abolitionist Power's attempt to undermine the loyalty of the enslaved population would ultimately fail. Hammond insisted that "Every insurrection which has yet been meditated—and there have been very few—when not discovered by some faithful slave, has been soon discovered by the whites." Furthermore, he told his northern colleagues, "I say it boldly, there is not a happier, more contended [sic] race upon the face of the earth. I have been brought up in the midst of them, and, so far as my knowledge and experience extend, I should say they have every reason to be happy." He also challenged John Quincy Adams's belief that enslaved families were routinely separated when slaveholders sold them. Slaveholders loved their slaves, he insisted. Hammond asserted that the enslaved themselves would never participate in "the horrid process of burning and assassination" supported by abolitionists against the slaveholding class, despite the possibility that some might have a

³³ Ibid.

"secret" wish for emancipation.³⁴

In his concluding remarks, however, Hammond turned from his confidence in the happiness and passivity of the black population in the South to a blunt appeal to racial prejudice. During the final minutes of his fervent defense of slavery, he asked the House of Representatives what he believed to be a hypothetical question: What if slavery could be erased peacefully? Would Americans be "prepared for the consequences which must follow?" He wondered,

Are the people of the North prepared to restore to them two fifths of their rights of voters, and place their political power on an equality with their own? Are we prepared to see them mingling in our legislation? Is any portion of this country prepared to see them enter these halls and take their seats by our sides, in perfect equality with the white representatives of an Anglo-Saxon race—to see them fill that chair—to see them placed at the heads of your Departments, or perhaps some Othello, or Toussaint, or Boyer, gifted with genius and inspired by ambition, grasp the presidential wreath.³⁵

The white population of the United States, James Henry Hammond contended, regardless of section, would never allow their white republic to give equal standing to black freemen.

Hammond's long congressional address ended with what he believed would be a frightening thought for the white public to ponder. Gradual emancipation, he argued,

³⁴ Ibid., 2457. In order to undermine the fear caused by Turner's insurrection, Hammond declared that a few "drunken wretches" sparked the Southampton revolt.

³⁵ Ibid., 2458.

would be impossible to implement, while immediate emancipation, as he earlier suggested, proved too costly and dangerous. He pointed to the West Indies, specifically Jamaica, as an example of a failed gradual emancipation scheme and implied that northerners in the U.S. did not fully understand black people. He continued, "Those who know the negro character cannot doubt, what the recent experiments in the West Indies fully prove, that the first step you take towards emancipation bursts at once and forever the fetters of the slave." Emancipation in South Carolina, he warned, "would not last a day, an hour" before a "civil war between the whites and the blacks" broke out, "the result of which could not be doubtful, although it would be accompanied with horrors such as history has not recorded" and "the blacks would be annihilated." He closed by saying, "such a catastrophe would be inevitable."³⁶ Slaveholders and their northern allies could therefore come to only one conclusion. In order to prevent such a catastrophe, they needed to actively control the federal government and ensure that abolitionists never did. Defenders of slavery and the Union could begin by ending the acceptance of antislavery petitions by what many have called "the People's branch of government," the House of Representatives.³⁷

Throughout this debate regarding the acceptance of antislavery petitions and the resulting discussion of slavery that followed in the nation's capital, a large group of southerners and their northern allies branded the antislavery movement a dangerous threat to the nation. During the initial debate over receiving petitions to remove slavery from the national capital, it became apparent that some slaveholding members of

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

Congress did not see abolitionists as moralists so consumed by their beliefs that they did not understand the consequences of their actions. Instead, several southern representatives began to describe abolitionists as evil enemies who purposely wanted to kill white southerners. Waddy Thompson, one of Hammond's South Carolina colleagues, moved past simply calling abolitionists "fanatics." He angrily told the House, "The fanatics? Fanatics, did I say sir? Never before was so vile a band dignified with that name. They are murderers, foul murderers, accessories before the fact, and they know it, of murder, robbery, rape, infanticide."³⁸

Antislavery members of Congress, however, challenged the highly charged new language that was emerging in the proslavery movement. William Slade from Vermont rhetorically asked if their debates following the Turner insurrection had caused slave rebellion, and wondered, if slaves had not fomented insurrections then, why would petitions now produce them? Quoting a Virginian newspaper's recollection of the debate over slavery in the Old Dominion, he asked: "If it was 'glorious' and safe for Virginia to 'grapple with the monster' in 1832,"³⁹ why would not it be glorious for Congress to do the same? The answer he received to this question shows just how far the proslavery movement had shifted in its understanding of how best to defend slavery in the South after the emancipation in the West Indies and the abolitionist postal campaign.

James Garland, from Virginia, rose to respond to the Vermont congressman and explained why southern members of Congress had recently become more concerned about petitions sent to the Capitol, as compared to the years and decades before. He said,

³⁸ Ibid., 2006.

³⁹ Ibid., 2059.

"There is another reason why the action of Congress should be more decisive now than at any former period, and why the people of the South should call for a more direct expression of the sentiments of this House heretofore. On former occasions there was no extraordinary feeling of alarm...of danger, spread throughout [the South]." However, following the postal campaign abolitionists had shown how much they threatened the security of the slave system. Garland emphasized, "The spirit of insurrection and insubordination was not then abroad. It was reversed for the last summer's campaign of a few fanatics." Like fellow congressman Waddy Thompson, Garland no longer accepted the idea that abolitionists did not understand the result of undermining the power of slaveholders in the South. He continued, "My colleagues called them blood-hounds, but that term is too mild. I call them fiends of hell."⁴⁰ Abolitionists wanted to kill southern whites—not just end slavery—the Virginian told the members of Congress.

Furthermore, Garland put pressure on northern allies to stand strong with the proslavery movement by tying together everyone who supported ending slavery under one tent. In the eyes of the proslavery forces in Congress, northerners could no longer get away with being against abolition but not actively working to protect slavery. The Virginian stated, "These abolitionists (I class them all together) have excited a feeling of alarm in the South which cannot easily be quieted. The safety of our wives and our children is endangered by their mischievous and incendiary attempts to produce a servile insurrection among our slaves" because abolitionists, he argued, "calculated to encourage, if not to excite, the slaves themselves to insubordination and insurrection" because "they

⁴⁰ Ibid., 2066-2067.

know everything that transpires here."⁴¹

While Garland did not ask for direct aid from northerners to help control the enslaved populace, he told Congress that southerners did have a request for their northern allies. He appealed "to our brethren of the North in behalf of our wives and our children, and for the protection and security against the instigators of midnight murder and assassination. Our northern friends cannot realize our true situation; they are distantly removed from our slave population, and know but little of their character and disposition." Proslavery congressmen claimed that northern congressmen, like the abolitionists in the British Parliament who lived thousands of miles away from the Caribbean, would experience little danger if an insurrection broke out. The South, the congressman argued, meaning, of course, white southerners, understood its precarious position involving its slave population better than anyone else. He asked northerners who supported the South: "Knowing our danger, and feeling it, too, we appeal...to the North to do their duty to the South, and to the Union by discharging their obligations to the constitution." The time had come, in the words of another southern congressman, for the North to show whether "they are either for [the South] or against [The South]."⁴² The population of the free states, according to the members of the proslavery movement, held the duty of preventing the United States from becoming like the new enemy of slavery, England.

As in most political negotiations, the proslavery movement did not get exactly what it wanted in the end. Rather than directly violate the First Amendment—or at least

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 1978, 2066-2067; Wyly-Jones, "The Antiabolitionist Panic," 234-236.

redefine it—the Democratic-led Congress passed a rule proposed by South Carolinian Thomas Pinckney that became known as the "gag rule." The new rule, which had to be re-introduced at the beginning of every session of Congress, stated that the House must accept every antislavery memorial, but must also immediately table that petition from further discussion without further consideration. This automatic rejection of antislavery petitions caused uproar in parts of the North and from antislavery members of Congress, especially former president John Quincy Adams, who would spend the rest of his life fighting what he considered the notorious rule at the beginning of each congressional session. It soon became apparent to the American public, however, that southerners had gained more authority over the machinations of Congress.⁴³

The extremists within the proslavery movement were left unsatisfied. Pinckney would be defeated in the next election because of the criticism that he allowed the House to accept dangerous petitions before disposing of them, as well as for "rebellious" against Calhoun, who after seeing the effectiveness of Hammond moved to create an even stronger gag rule in the Senate. The movement did win a significant victory, however. Northern Democrats joined an almost unanimous southern congressional delegation—only three dissented—in voting in favor of the new rule. Despite their attempts to hurt the vice president's chance at victory in 1836 by forcing him to choose a side of the slavery debate, the Pinckney rule actually helped solidify Martin Van Buren's electoral chances in the year's upcoming presidential elections. In supporting slavery without eroding his northern base, Andrew Jackson's chosen successor, Martin Van Buren, a New Yorker who was distrusted by the South nevertheless managed to keep intact his delicate

⁴³ Wyly-Jones, "The Antiabolitionist Panic," 234.

coalition of proslavery southerners and their northern allies and win the presidency. By the 1840s the proslavery movement would be even more powerful, and the gag rule would be further strengthened and would include more topics deemed unacceptable to discuss in Congress because they threatened slavery.⁴⁴

The clash between antislavery members bearing petitions against slavery and passionate defenders of the South's peculiar institution showed that the Democratic Party might be the vehicle by which the proslavery movement could achieve its ends. Over 60 percent of Democrats from the free states joined every southern representative—though some of the ardent proslavery partisans chose to boycott casting a vote because Pinckney's gag technically accepted petitions in Congress—in voting for the gag rule. Speaker of the House James K. Polk explained, "the unanimous vote of the friends of Mr. V. Buren (with less than half of dozen exceptions) on Pinckney's resolutions must satisfy that they are sound upon that subject [of slavery]."⁴⁵ While the Senate discussed the role of free speech in a nation that held slaves and decided that the former trumped the latter, the House of Representatives did the opposite.

Northern Democratic support for the South against antislavery petitions was not confined to the halls of Congress. New York Governor William Marcy took on the abolitionists in 1836, contending, as did others of the proslavery movement, that their

⁴⁴ J. R. Poinsett to James B. Campbell October 20, 1836 in Samuel Gaillard Stoney, ed., "Poinsett-Campbell Correspondence (Continued)," *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 42 (Oct., 1941): 149-168; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, vol 1, 345-349; Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 366-372. For an important discussion of the Senate's version of the gag rule, which caused less public outrage in the North and received little attention, see Daniel Wirls, " 'The only Mode of Avoiding Everlasting Debate': The Overlooked Senate Gag Rule for Antislavery Petitions," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (Spring, 2007): 115-138.

⁴⁵ James K. Polk to William R. Rucker, February 22, 1836 in *Correspondence of James K. Polk* ed. Herbert Weaver (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1975): 3: 511-513; Wyly-Jones, "The Abolitionist Panic," 232-263.

plans of emancipation would lead to "servile war" rather than a peaceful transition to free labor. According to Governor Marcy, "The very first act in this scheme of abolition, which is carried on under the guide of religion, morality, and love for mankind, would open with insurrection, massacre, and servile war, in which, if the slaves triumph, their masters must be victims." He also criticized the belief that concerns over safety could be used to promote the ending of slavery in the United States. Marcy wrote, "If slave-owners ever concur in any plan for the abolition of slavery, it must arise from a better motive than fear." He argued that abolitionists hurt the antislavery movement by making southern slaveholders more determined "to maintain the institution of slavery" and stated that if southerners did not feel that they could be protected under the Constitution, they would surely leave.⁴⁶ The South had friends in high places in the North in the form of the Democratic Party.

During the debate over the petitions, slave state legislatures sent their own resolutions to Congress, illustrating the proslavery understanding of free speech. Kentucky—not Alabama, Louisiana, South Carolina, or other Deep South states that had become well known for the devotion of their legislatures to slavery—offered a succinct explanation of why free speech laws needed to be slanted towards defending slavery. Their petition read: "The freedom of the press is one thing—its licentiousness another; whilst the former is justly dear to every freeman, the other is the object of deep reprobation. It cannot be that the right of discussion at the North carries with it the right

⁴⁶ Richmond *Enquirer*, January 14, 1836.

to excite a portion of the population of a sister State to rapine and murder."⁴⁷ The members of the proslavery movement did not just win a symbolic victory with the establishment of the gag rule; rather, they legitimized their understanding of the freedom of expression within the realm of mainstream politics and proved to themselves the viability of an active defense of slavery at the national level.

Proslavery forces in Congress also saw how powerful the argument against the Abolitionist Power could be, and they hoped to extend it to foreign policy and national defense. During the debate, southerners labeled England as a partner in an international conspiracy to attack southern slavery. For example, during a discussion of abolitionism in the Senate, Alfred Cuthbert, a Georgian, stated, "Why am I...insensible to these terrors? For this plain and obvious reason, that the spirit of abolition was not an American spirit; it was transplanted from a foreign soil; it belonged not here, and was a base mockery of what had passed in another country, whose relations to their slave populations were not similar to ours, but stood in absolute contrast with them."⁴⁸

American patriotism, the senator exclaimed, would stand up to abolitionism—which he believed consisted of foreign principles—because the United States was inherently different from England and other European nations that had experienced an end of slavery in their colonial holdings. "Our people had evinced that patriotism in resisting with energy and success that wide-spread and wild spirit of fanaticism which threatened to produce jealousies and heart-burning in a united and happy country" though

⁴⁷ Resolutions of the Legislature of Kentucky S.doc 249 24th Cong, 1 sess. See also Resolutions of the Legislature of Virginia, Adverse to the movements made for the abolition of slavery, &c, S.doc 233; Memorial of the Legislature of Alabama, Against the measures of the abolitionists, and against interfering with the subject of slavery in the District of Columbia S.doc 124.

⁴⁸ *Appendix to the Congressional Globe* 24 Cong., 1 sess., 142-144.

this fanaticism, he said, had "tended to weaken the bonds of Union" it ended up only showing "its durability and its strength...As the lofty pine on the mountains becomes more firmly rooted as it is shaken by the tempest, so had the love for this Union taken deeper roots in our hearts."⁴⁹

While the proslavery movement attempted to define the antislavery cause as anti-American, it also worked to paint their opponents as being anti-white and did so by hoping to portray the abolitionist movement as pro-black. Cuthbert expressed his belief that "there is a stronger natural horror and aversion for the black race in the North than in the South."⁵⁰ That aversion, he believed, could tie together the Union. Therefore, supporting slavery at the national level, to maintain the safety of all white Americans from what southerners routinely called a "servile war," became a way of supporting national security from outside forces as well.

West Indian emancipation, even before it was officially enacted, had scared American planters. Many proslavery southerners saw in the British Empire the worst combination they could imagine—a powerful nation with large military capabilities and colonial holdings, merged with a substantial population of newly freed blacks, located just hundreds of miles off the American coast, instilled with the "fanaticism" of the antislavery movement. Southern planters viewed England as a state sponsor of abolitionism intent on spreading its message with no regard for the safety of Americans. England, and Europe in general, they feared, wanted to spread the Haitian Revolution's spirit to the United States. The goals of the Abolitionist Power to end slavery through

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 143.

insurrection or federal power could be put into action unless the rest of those who lived in the United States took precautions. One southern congressman summarized this idea on the floor of the House of Representatives in 1836. He stated, "In the presence of the armed monarchies of Europe, with all the powerful elements both on this and the other side of the Atlantic, already in incipient commotion, already rumbling in their deep crater," Americans would have to remain strongly tied together in order to fight off the incoming enemy intent on threatening the American white republic.⁵¹ Slavery needed to be protected so that the nation could defend itself rather than being torn apart by abolitionists hoping to create "prolific discord" and force the United States into succumbing to the Abolitionist Power.

As the historical record proves, the fear among southern planters that stemmed from English abolition in the West Indies was far from new. A few years before emancipation was carried out in the English West Indies, a southern diplomat to Jamaica named Robert Monroe Harrison warned the South about the possibility of the Caribbean islands serving as a launching pad for abolitionism against American slavery. Harrison worried that following the emancipation of the West Indies, Great Britain would pressure other slaveholding nations to free their slaves. When other countries refused, he contended, England would enact policies to foment insurrection. He further argued that once emancipation was implemented, all black Jamaicans should be banned from entering the United States, since they would undoubtedly travel from the Caribbean in

⁵¹ *Register of the Debates*, 24 Congress. 1 sess., 2005-2006.

order to "poison the minds of the *Negroes* in the *Slaveholding States*!"⁵² Many southerners believed that American slavery in the 1830s, just as during the Haitian Revolution, could become infected by the spreading influence of freedom in the Western Hemisphere.

Furthermore, in 1833, Robert Harrison asked his superiors in the State Department to send a warship to the Caribbean, arguing that Jamaica was on the verge of a large insurrection due to its upcoming emancipation of the enslaved. From June 1833 to August 1, 1844, the day of emancipation, Harrison sent seven dispatches asking for the American Navy to patrol the Caribbean, each predicting certain rebellion similar to that of the Haitian Revolution. Far from being alone among the proslavery adherents, Harrison's beliefs were shared by many other proslavery leaders. During the 1830s and 1840s, southerners used their power in Congress not only to attack northern abolitionism through policies such as the gag rule, but also to reinforce the security of their slave system by promoting stronger defensive measures in the Gulf of Mexico. Strong defenses would prepare the U.S. for the possibility of England quenching its "fanatical" urge by using their colonial black population to strike against slavery in the United States of America.⁵³

Proslavery proponents utilized arguments based on national security and distrust of Europe to bolster the federal government's role in protecting slavery in the United

⁵² Edward Bartlett Rugemer, "Robert Monroe Harrison, British Abolition, Southern Anglophobia and Texas Annexation" *Slavery and Abolition* 28 (Aug. 2007): 172-173; Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation*, 180-221.

⁵³ Edward Bartlett Rugemer, "Robert Monroe Harrison," 172-173.

States. The proslavery, pro-South tilt of the Twenty-Fourth Congress extended beyond the gag rule. As the first session came to a close in July, Congress appropriated money "towards the purchase of a site and the building of an arsenal of deposite [sic] and general construction" near Fayetteville, North Carolina, with very little debate. In another example of members from the deep South more assertively pressing for federal provisions, Senator William Rufus King of Alabama tried to move a proposed armory "for the West" to his state, nearly 400 miles southeast of the original project location.⁵⁴ King did not get his way; however, his proposal resonated with other southerners who believed they needed to have more protection closer to home. He had actively promoted the military strengthening of the southern states—especially the Gulf Coast, the avenue some planters feared could be used to attack the South from the Caribbean. When southerners actively used the federal government for protection and expansion of its interests, concentrated power in Washington, especially military strength, no longer seemed to be the biggest threat to slavery in the United States.

The fear of ending up like feckless the planters of the Caribbean became a constant theme of proslavery rhetoric as the decade of the 1830s came to a close. In 1838, for example, future senator of South Carolina Robert Barnwell Rhett argued that Europe actively worked against slaveholding interests. He worried about the influence that England or France might have on the northern population of the United States, telling his South Carolina audience to "Mark this history of fanaticism in foreign nations. Born in atheism, and baptized in the blood of revolutionary France, it accomplished its purpose

⁵⁴ *Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America* vol. 5, 47; *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 9, 1836; *Congressional Globe*, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 588-589.

there. In England it has sprung up under the guise of religion and it has accomplished its purpose there. It has never yet failed, and never will fail, in accomplishing its purpose, where the slaveholder does not control his own destinies."⁵⁵ When Rhett talked about the "blood" that had "baptized" abolitionism in France, he did not mean the Reign of Terror in Europe. He meant the death of whites in the Caribbean. He combined Anglophobia with the undercurrent of fear that a Haitian-style revolution could happen in America to insist that the northern allies of enslavement in the United States continue to support the proslavery cause.

The mixing of resentment against a former foe in England with a latent belief that a Haitian-type revolt could occur in the United States spurred proslavery supporters in the federal government to promote southern military defenses. Southerners, furthermore, went beyond trying to win the placement of a few armories throughout their region instead of in the North. As historian Matthew J. Karp has shown, slaveholders also tried to spread the influence of the proslavery movement within the navy during the antebellum period because they believed that the expansion of naval forces would protect the slave states from an invasion launched by England from the West Indies.⁵⁶

Haiti, as it always had, remained a threat in the minds of southern planters. During his one term as a representative of South Carolina, Hugh Swinton Legaré gave a speech that showed how much spokesmen of the proslavery movement worried about the threat free blacks of the Caribbean posed to the American slave system. In December 18, 1838, Legaré—like Hammond before him—challenged the reception of a petition offered

⁵⁵ *Niles' National Register* vol. 53 (WM. Ogden Niles: Washington, D.C., 1838): 356-358.

⁵⁶ Matthew J. Karp, "Slavery and American Sea Power: The Navalist Impulse in the Antebellum South," *The Journal of Southern History* 87 (May 2011): 284-324.

by Leverett Saltonstall of Massachusetts; however, unlike Hammond's, Legaré's petition did not have a direct relationship to the enslavement of blacks in the United States.

Rather, the memorial offered by the northern congressman prayed "for the recognition of the Republic of Hayti, and the establishment of international relations with her."⁵⁷

To Legaré, this petition seemed as dangerous, if not more so, than asking for the ending of slavery in the nation's capital. He also believed it to be another part of the grand conspiracy of the Abolitionist Power to eradicate slavery from the country by any means necessary. He told Congress, "The memorials before you, as I understand, are but another step in the war which a band of wicked conspirators are daring to wage upon the constitution and the peace of the country." The petition, Legaré claimed, "[aimed] at *abolition*" and was "part of a system" that intended "the ruin of the South." Recognizing Haiti, he maintained, would make the South, "from the Susquehanna to the Red river—from the capes of Virginia to the recesses of the Missouri," feel uneasy and "[throb] with indignation and alarm" because it "involves their life and being." The mere discussion of officially recognizing the only nation to be born from a slave rebellion needed to be squashed because that, too, threatened the safety of slavery in the southern parts of the United States.⁵⁸ The gag rule, at least for the proslavery movement, needed to be extended to foreign policy.

The idea of black troops wearing the red coats of the British army and marching throughout the South to free the enslaved of America was the planters' greatest nightmare. Nearly three weeks after Legaré attacked the petition to officially recognize

⁵⁷ *Writings of Hugh Swinton Legaré*, 322.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 326-327. Petitions asking for the recognition of Haiti were also sent to free state legislatures. For example see Columbus *Ohio Statesman*, March 3, 1840.

Haiti, the proslavery members of Congress again attempted to assert their authority by igniting fears of an attack by England launched from the West Indies against the slave states on the Gulf of Mexico. The issue revolved around where to build a new dry dock for the navy—Philadelphia or Pensacola, Florida. Waddy Thompson opened the debate for the southern side by quoting the words of the former Secretary of the Navy, Samuel Southard of New Jersey, who Thompson stated had with his "enlarged and enlightened patriotism which has illustrated his whole public life," urged Congress to fortify Florida because, as he quoted further from the former head of the Navy, " 'The whole country from Alleghany to the Gulf, is interested in establishment of a naval station at Pensacola. With whatever nation we may be at war, the principal theater will be the Gulf of Mexico, and the object of attack the commerce of the Mississippi.' " ⁵⁹

Legaré also put himself in the middle of the debate over where the new naval yards should be built. He wanted to shore up the defense of the southern coastline, however, and touched on a threat far more dangerous than simply the loss of commerce—the British antislavery impulse. The South Carolina congressman told the House of Representatives that he believed the United States needed a stronger naval presence in the Gulf of Mexico because the West Indies might serve as "either the strongholds of the great powers, with a view to hold us in check, or dens of picaroons and bucaniers [sic]" who would threaten the South. ⁶⁰ Southern slaveholders explicitly showed that outside dangers of attack, even from unorganized pirates, could weaken their control over the enslaved population they held in their cities and on their plantations.

⁵⁹ Congressional Globe, 25 Cong., 3 sess., 35-44, quotation, 43.

⁶⁰ Karp, "Slavery and American Sea Power," 296; *Writings of Huger Swinton Legaré*, 334.

Other proslavery leaders expressed their concerns more explicitly, rather than mentioning pirates and buccaneers as Legaré did. An editorialist in the Charleston *Southern Patriot* wrote that having a naval station in Florida was desperately needed because England always served as a constant threat to American slaveholders. He stated that Key West could act as an "avenue of entrance to the enemy—to the black regiments of [England's] cruel policy."⁶¹ If England could serve as the conveyor of the Haitian Revolution to America, the Gulf of Mexico presented the path that led from the West Indies to the United States South.

Southern leaders were not alone in sensing both the dangers to the nation posed by England's antislavery impulse and the possibility of that nation using blacks troops to spur rebellion and chaos among the enslaved population in a time of war. Many northerners concurred. In 1837, for example, Captain Charles Stewart, a Philadelphian who throughout his life served various positions within the United States Navy, wrote about the threat posed by America's former enemy. In a published letter to the secretary of the navy, he declared, "The new principles of European policy and reform in relation to their American colonies, aided by the fanatics spread over our own country, exciting an insurrectionary spirit among a numerous class of our south-western populations...admonish us not to trust too far our own peaceful habits and passive disposition, but to apply all means...for the permanent defense of that interesting portion of the Union." A naval station in Pensacola, he argued, would serve the interest of national defense against the possible invasion from the West Indies.⁶²

⁶¹ Charleston *Southern Patriot*, January 27, 1840.

⁶² *Army and Navy Chronicle*, February 4, 1837.

During the 1840s, tensions between the United States and England seemed to be growing as the two nations conflicted over England's right to enforce the ban of the African slave trade by searching American ships. This tension grew after slaves on the American ship *Creole* rebelled against its white crew, gained control of the vessel, and guided it to freedom in the English Bahaman Island of Nassau, where the British government protected them from planters demanding their return to America.⁶³ Many leading southerners believed they needed to act, and they created plans to do so. The British, to them, seemed ready to up the ante in regards to slavery.

In order to blunt what they perceived as a growing antislavery influence in their hemisphere, southern politicians developed a strategy to keep American slavery safe from the supposed "fanatics" of both the North and England. Supported by the newly ascendant Tyler administration following the death of President William Henry Harrison, proslavery forces positioned national military and foreign policy in opposition to the international antislavery movement—perceiving England as a national security threat that hoped to spark a massive insurrection throughout the slave states. The proslavery movement gained near total control of the federal government and implemented a program focused on the strengthening of southern military defenses and the expansion of slavery westward.

As soon as he became secretary of the navy under President Tyler, Abel P. Upshur, one of the president's fellow Virginians, concentrated his efforts on strengthening the U. S. Navy's presence in the Caribbean. He worried that without a

⁶³ Don. E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 108-111, 161-172.

stronger show of naval power in the Gulf of Mexico, the South was at risk of invasion and possible slave insurrection incited by the English, both of which would be devastating to the slave states. In a report to the Senate, Upshur wrote, "The nature of our institutions presents a very strong appeal upon this point. A war between the United States and any considerable maritime Power would not be conducted at this day as it would have been even twenty years ago." The English, with the strongest navy in the world, definitely fell under the category of "any considerable maritime power," and they would not fight fairly. Instead, they would use the southern labor force against the United States in whole and the South in particular. He continued, "It would be a war of incursions aiming at revolution. The first blow would be struck at us through our own institutions."⁶⁴ The Virginian had not forgotten the history of Lord Dunmore during the American Revolution. Americans understood that the "revolution" Upshur wanted to avoid would be launched by the enslaved, emboldened by British antislavery sentiments, to follow the example of the Haitian rebels decades before.

While wanting to protect slavery, Upshur also understood the great liability such a large enslaved population posed to the safety of not just the region of the South but also to the nation as a whole. Abolitionists who wanted to attack the South, he reported, would unleash "the hostile elements of our social system against one another." While incursions launched by English steamships would be bad for every portion of the nation, he explained, "in the southern portion of our country they might, and probably would be disastrous in the extreme." Numerous southerners during the early 1840s worked to

⁶⁴ "Report of the Secretary of the Navy," *Senate Documents* 27th Cong. 2 sess. no 1/6 serial 395 (Washington, 1841).

strengthen the defense against the antislavery movement and promoted the expansion of American naval power as a way to do it.⁶⁵

Leaders of the proslavery movement openly expressed the fears that black West Indians might be used to attack the United States South. In 1841, for instance, Alabama Congressman Thomas Butler King, sitting on the Committee of Naval Affairs, wrote that the South's "unprotected harbors might be entered by fleets of armed steamers, loaded with black troops from the West Indies, to annoy and plunder the country."⁶⁶ It was not just the prospect of the British attacking the United States again that made southern slaveholders nervous. Rather, the feasibility of England using black troops—a group of warriors whom the enslaved people of the South might rally to join in a war against the master class—made plantation owners ask the federal government for more military protection in the Gulf of Mexico. While the expansion of federal power by enlarging the Navy might have seemed to some as antithetical to the South's states rights dogma, in the 1830s it coincided with increased antislavery pressure both from the North and from England and was viewed by many as a way to protect slavery from an outside foe.⁶⁷

However, for many southern planters and politicians, the expectation of extending slavery into the American West became the primary means of maintaining a stable system of slavery in a world that appeared to be heading towards abolitionism. The proslavery movement believed westward expansion of the United States—implemented by a federal government sympathetic to slaveholding—offered the best path to ensuring

⁶⁵ Ibid.; Karp, "Slavery and American Sea Power," 295-301.

⁶⁶ *House Reports*, 27 Cong., 1 sess., No. 3: Recommending Appropriations for Home Squadron Serial 393 (Washington, 1841): 2.

⁶⁷ Karp, "Slavery and American Sea Power," 320-324.

that the South would not become like the West Indies: hemmed in by limited land and dependent on a hostile government for protection. Unlike the Caribbean, where England had a stronghold, America had the West—a vast expanse of land that proslavery southerners believed could be used to defend slavery against abolitionism. With antislavery bolstered by Great Britain and supported by a growing percentage of northerners, the proslavery cause came to depend upon the South's not being hemmed in by free soil on its north, west, and Caribbean borders.

The specter of black troops from the Caribbean fighting for an English Empire as it invaded the United States from the West seemed too dangerous a possibility for Americans to sit idly by and miss their chance at claiming possession of the territory all the way to the Pacific. One military officer, writing in a newspaper from New Orleans in 1840, and republished in the *Army and Navy Chronicle*, wrote that he worried about "the unscrupulous fanatics of England" joining forces with Mexico in order to colonize "the Californias with her colored allies" from the Caribbean colonies. The author wrote, "Let Great Britain succeed in planting her colored battalions in the [Californias], and she will then have the Union surrounded by a chain of posts from New Brunswick to Honduras." Once again, protecting slavery became merged with protecting national security. The editorialist admitted that "all the energies of the Southern States" would be needed in order "to resist" if a black colony became established in the western part of the continent.⁶⁸ By including the Canadian province of New Brunswick, just north of Maine, as one of the destination points for the "chain" that Great Britain looked to be tightening around the United States, the writer inherently tied the slave states' concerns about black

⁶⁸ *Army and Navy Chronicle*, March 5, 1840.

troops with the safety of the northeastern free states.⁶⁹

During the 1830s, the southern proslavery movement, following the abolitionist postal campaign, called for the South to assert its control more actively over the machinery of the federal government. Leading this charge in posture, politicians from South Carolina challenged their state and others to follow their lead against what they considered to be a growing Abolitionist Power, an international scheme linking between radical abolitionists in both the North and England to not just end slavery, but to kill slaveholders and dismantle the white American republic as well. States' rights alone could not protect American planters from a strengthening antislavery movement. A powerful federal government, with a Congress that openly worked on the side of the South, was also needed to protect southern slavery against outside influence.

This new tactic of the proslavery movement scored its first victory by implementing the gag rule, which regulated what kind of petitions could be heard in Congress. It would not be the last. Southerners and their allies saw the newly freed English West Indies as a dangerous threat to the United States in general and the slave South in particular. Though vital to American trade, the Gulf of Mexico could also serve as a highway leading rebellious freed black men directly into the underbelly of national security. Such an attempt by England could incite a massive rebellion on the part of the South's large enslaved population. In reaction to this threat, southerners called for more defenses and a stronger navy to protect the southern coastline.

The feelings of foreboding that some in the United States sensed from England

⁶⁹ Sam W. Haynes, "Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas: The Quest For National Security," in eds Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997): 115-145.

did not just stem from that nation's superior maritime power, but also from some of its claims on lands in the western part of the North American continent. Southerners actively worried that England, in conjunction with Mexico, planned to create black colonies to the west of the American border—despite frequent reassurances by English leadership that they held no such plans. Americans sought options not only to protect itself but also to expand as a growing nation. In the 1840s, however, California did not become the top priority for American slaveholders who wanted to expand slave territory in North America. Instead, the proslavery movement first looked closer to home, across the Sabine River from Louisiana. There, American immigrants rebelled against the Mexican government when slavery became endangered and created their own independent nation that stretched from the Gulf Coast to the Rio Grande. If annexed to the United States, the Republic of Texas offered massive amounts of new land to American slaveholders that could serve as a buffer from a potentially aggressive England while also expanding the South's slaveholding region. With an invigorated proslavery class using the Democratic Party as an apparatchik to control the federal government, the debate over the annexation of Texas would launch a discussion about the future of slavery in the United States of America and the role of the federal government in serving to protect it that would simmer for two decades.

Chapter Five

Texas Annexation and the Proslavery Promise

WHEREAS, The recent developments in Federal affairs make it evident that the power of the Federal Government is sought to be made a weapon with which to strike down the interests and property of the people of Texas, and her sister slave-holding States, instead of permitting it to be, as was intended, our shield against outrage and aggression, THEREFORE...Texas is of right absolved from all restraints and obligations incurred by said compact, and is a separate sovereign State, and that her citizens and people are absolved from all allegiance to the United States or the government thereof.

-Texas Ordinance of Secession, February 1, 1861.¹

As the nation's appetite for westward expansion grew in the late-1830s and 1840s, southern slaveholders looked hungrily at territories as far away as California. Closer to home, however, a new republic, filled with slaveholding emigrants from the United States, had just been founded. Sympathetic to America and desirous of joining their neighbor as a part of the United States, Texans offered their southern counterparts a vast new area in which to expand slavery. The promise of this region touched off a debate over Texas annexation that reverberated across the nation. American politics would become consumed with the question of slavery's role in American expansion from an unlikely source—John Tyler. Eventually, the debate over slavery's role in expansion would eventually tear the nation apart at the seams and lead to the deadliest war in the nation's history. Adding Texas to the Union became the first time that Americans debated

¹ David Franklin Houston, ed., *American History Leaflets, Colonial and Constitutional, November 1893: Ordinances of Secession and Other Documents, 1860-1861* (New York: A. Lovell and Company, 1893): 15-16.

the issue of increasing its slaveholding era after the emancipation of the British West Indies.

Despite Mexico's objections to the institution of slavery, many immigrants to Texas between 1822 and 1825 came from the American South, bringing their slaves with them and creating an enslaved society that mirrored that of their former country.

Throughout the decade before the Texas Revolution, Texans routinely found ways around Mexican laws that barred enslavement by creating loopholes in the law, such as calling slaves "indentured servants," that allowed slavery a de facto existence in Mexican Texas.

Stephen F. Austin, regarded as the "Father of Texas," believed that his new colony "must" have slavery in order to survive. Though Austin echoed the sentiment of his fellow colonists, the Mexican government tightened regulations on the institution in the 1830s. Subsequently, the Texan leader described his ambivalence towards bringing more enslaved blacks into his colony. In a letter to his business partner in 1831, Austin—born two years after the beginning of the Haitian Revolution—wrote, "I sometimes shudder at the consequences [of slavery] and think that a large part [of] America will be Santa Domingonized in 100 or 200 years." Slavery, he believed, brought with it inherent danger many slaveholders before him had believed: the larger the black population, the increased chance of a massive rebellion. His fellow colonists, however, demanded more slaves. Seeing no alternative, Austin concluded, "I am now in for the question and there is not retreat."² Regardless of Austin's fears, the people made the decision and supported the

² Stephen F. Austin to Samuel May Williams, April 16, 1831 in *The Papers of Stephen F. Austin* ed. Eugene C. Barker (Washington and Austin, 1924-1928): 2: 645; Randolph B. Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1989): 1-34; Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 110-114.

importation of more black slaves into their growing colony. Texas would be slave country despite the laws of Mexico outlawing it. In the years that followed its revolution Texas would be viewed as being able to hold at least two million slaves by some proslavery adherents, serving as a safety valve for excess slaves in the growing enslaved population of the United States South.³

In April 1834 relations between Mexico and Texas began to deteriorate. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna came to power and repudiated the national constitution, proclaiming himself dictator and promoting a more centralized government. By September 1835, Texans held a convention to discuss how they should react to the strengthening of the Mexican federal government. The following month, Americans in Mexico's northeastern province clashed with Santa Anna's forces in the Battle of Gonzales. The Texas Revolution had begun.⁴

Leaders in Washington watched intently for news from Texas, determining how the United States should react. Just as southern planters worried about possible insurrections inspired by the abolitionist postal campaign, their counterparts in Texas worried that Mexico's armed forces planned to foment black rebellion in order to help put down the white Texans. One participant in the Texas Revolution expressed the fear many Texans felt. Mexicans, he wrote, would introduce "the sickly philanthropy of the abolitionists in the United States." The planters in control of Texas believed free blacks could only create more danger in their new country. Therefore, to mitigate the risk of

³ Austin *Texas State Gazette*, July 17, 1858; Marshall *Texas Republican*, December 10, 1858; Campbell, *Empire For Slavery*, 65-66.

⁴ Campbell, *Empire for Slavery*, 40-41. Mexican laws prohibited slavery, however, for many years slavery in Texas was simply ignored by the Mexican government as it practiced a version of salutary neglect for its northeastern border province to the United States.

insurrection during the revolution, the provisional government made it illegal for "any free negro or mulatto to come within the limits of Texas." The original constitution of the Republic of Texas, created in 1836 before independence, took this approach a step further by enshrining into constitutional law a prohibition of any further permanent residencies for free blacks within the Lone Star Republic. It stated, "No free person of African descent, either in whole or in part, shall be permitted to reside permanently in the republic without the consent of congress."⁵ Just as South Carolinians and Georgians had proposed harsh new restrictions in the aftermath of insurrection scares, Texas slaveholders in revolution viewed black people—both free and enslaved—as a dangerous element of society. The only way to ensure the safety of a slave society was to ensure that the overwhelming majority of blacks living in the area remained in bondage.

As fighting continued between the Texans and the Mexican government, Stephen F. Austin worked to ensure victory and independence through an American alliance. In a letter to Lewis F. Linn, a senator from Missouri, Austin pleaded for help by posturing Texas as a sister to the United States, claiming that its revolution against Santa Anna's government was important to American security. He wrote, "For fifteen years I have been laboring like a slave to *Americanise* Texas—to form a nucleus around which my native countrymen could collect and grow into a solid body that would forever be a barrier of safety to the Southwestern frontier, and especially the outlet of the Western world—mouth of the Mississippi—and which would be the beacon-light to the Mexicans

⁵ *Journal of the Proceedings of the General Council of the Republic of Texas Held at San Felipe de Austin, November 14th, 1835* (Houston, 1839): 173; Campbell, *Empire for Slavery*, 45-47.

in their search after liberty."⁶ Providing help for Texas independence provided safety for the American slave South, which the fledgling republic bordered on the east, he contended.

The Texas War of Independence, Austin warned, had devolved into a "war of extermination against anglo-Americans, and their principles and interests." He did not believe, however, that Americans should worry about a Mexican invasion in the western frontier. Instead, he argued that Americans had to be wary of "the peril of an Indian and servile war—the murder of women and children, and the loss of civilization of Texas."⁷ Recognition of Texas as an independent nation, he assured Linn, would serve as a necessary, preventative measure against insurrection in the American slave states.

Austin contended, "The Americanism of Texas, is of more real service to the protection of Louisiana, Arkansas and Missouri." The United States, the Texan proclaimed, had a duty to "march into Texas, and say to the pirate Santa Anna, 'stop,' a great and philanthropic and free people, will not stand tamely by and see justice, constitutional right and humanity, wantonly violated at her door; nor can a paternal Government tolerate such a state of things on its most vulnerable and important frontier." Austin's reasoning was easy to understand for any American who valued stability and safety in the United States. Any other alternative, Austin wrote, would "bring the bloody tide of savage war, and the horrors of negro insurrection" to the American South.⁸

Washington needed to act, he pleaded; otherwise a slave rebellion that could be spread

⁶ *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, May 25, 1836, *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, May 10, 1836; *Richmond Enquirer*, May 17, 1836; *St. Louis Daily Commercial Bulletin*, June 3, 1836.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

throughout the American South could be sparked in the Texas prairies.

Following the Battle of San Jacinto, where Texan troops captured the Mexican president and forced him to sign a treaty granting Texas independence, the new Lone Star Republic immediately requested to join the United States. Sam Houston, the general who defeated Santa Anna and new president of Texas, wrote to Andrew Jackson in November 1836, expressing a "great desire...that our country, Texas, shall be annexed to the U. States" because Texas, despite having gained its separation from Mexico, would be very unlikely to "to sustain ourselves against any power who are not impotent." He asked that Old Hickory, acting as a "friend of liberty," use his sway to gain Congress' acceptance of Texas as a new state in the Union.⁹

Texas statehood would be viewed differently than Texas recognition in Washington. Firstly, President Jackson, as well as his successors Martin Van Buren and William Henry Harrison, believed that annexation could not be considered without disturbing the nation's diplomatic relationship with the Mexican government or adding to a political rift between the North and South that had occurred during the 1830s. Despite trying to purchase Texas earlier in his term, Andrew Jackson delayed his decision to recognize Texas as a sovereign nation until months after the capture and capitulation of Santa Anna. Americans, he believed, would not want to spark a possible war with their neighbor. Though many in the United States wanted to annex this new republic bordering Louisiana and Arkansas, Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren decided to tread lightly for fear of annexation creating another sectional crisis between the free and slave states.

⁹ Randolph Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 160-165; Sam Houston to Andrew Jackson, November 22, 1836 republished in Washington, Tx. *Texas National Register*, December 17, 1845.

They both worked to temper the issue of slavery within American politics.¹⁰

By the late 1830s, the longstanding posture of Jackson and Van Buren towards Texas seemed a wise one. Hostility against annexation grew in the free states, where many opposed slavery's expansion. The movement to add Texas to the Union persisted in the background of American politics, however, even as the country went through a financial crisis that crippled the economy in 1837. Anti-annexationists continued their onslaught against annexationists. No one summed up the movement's resentment better than William Ellery Channing. Born in New England to the son of a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Channing first gained fame in 1819 as a Unitarian minister who challenged Calvinism in Baltimore. At that time, his antislavery conviction had not fully developed, and years passed before the theologian concluded that slavery was a moral blight that should be dealt with swiftly. This transformation that led him to the antislavery movement came only after spending time in the Danish West Indies on the cusp of British emancipation. Once committed to the abolitionist cause, however, he served as a leading, clear voice for the movement outside the halls of Congress while John Quincy Adams continued to fight against slavery within it.¹¹

Channing's works on slavery were advertised in antislavery newspapers as a way to spread his message. In 1837 he wrote "A Letter on the Annexation of Texas to the United States" that he addressed to Henry Clay—the presumed frontrunner for the Whig

¹⁰ *Register of the Debates*, 24 Cong., 2 sess., 1137-1140; John M. Belohlavek, "Let the Eagle Soar!" *The Foreign Policy of Andrew Jackson* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985): 117-118, 233-234.

¹¹ Arthur W. Brown, *William Ellery Channing*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962): 45-48; Edward Bartlett Rugemer discusses in closer detail Channing's conversion to the antislavery movement and the connection between American and British abolitionism. See Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation*, 145-179.

nomination in 1840. The letter received attention in numerous newspapers throughout the North. Channing's letter established the antislavery movement's position regarding the annexation of Texas. The minister warned Clay, the former president of the American Colonialization Society, that if he used his political power to "promote" his "views on the subject of this communication," it would "accomplish a good, to which, perhaps, no other man in this country is equal."¹² In his public message Channing articulated the antislavery position, explaining their devotion against Texas annexation and showing why the two Democratic presidents sympathetic to expansion had refused to seriously attempt annexation.

In the beginning sections of his polemic against expanding the American borders to encompass Texas, Channing disputed the legitimacy of the Texas Revolution. He insisted the event had been "criminal" in exercise because the Texan colonists had deliberately disobeyed the oaths they took to submit to Mexican laws when they were granted land—especially regulations regarding the importation of slavery to the area. He argued that because American colonists had sworn allegiance to Mexican authority and the Catholic church, they had no right to claim a grievance against Mexico for "being denied the right of worshipping God according to the dictates of their consciences" or being denied jury trials because "they were fully aware, before becoming the adopted citizens of the country, that this mode of trial was utterly unknown to its jurisprudence." Furthermore, Channing maintained that the consolidation of the government under Santa

¹² William E. Channing, *A Letter on the Annexation of Texas to the United States* (London: 1837): 2; *Boston Liberator*, June 30, 1837; *Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics*, August 12, 1837; *Newport, RI*, August 12, 1837; *Philadelphia National Gazette*, August 12, 1837; *Baltimore Sun*, August 12, 1837; *Cincinnati Weekly Herald and the Philanthropist*, August 18, 1837; *Boston Courier*, August 28, 1837.

Anna, the actions that sparked the Texas Revolution, was not in fact a usurpation of power. Rather, the Mexican dictator's move "was ratified by the National Congress according to the rules prescribed by the Constitution, and was sanctioned by the Mexican people." Taken altogether, Channing declared, "Texans, a handful of strangers, raised the standard of revolt, because the government was changed by a nation of nine millions without their consent."¹³ For Channing and many others in the antislavery, anti-annexation movement, Texans who rebelled against Mexico were unjustified in claiming that their rights had been revoked. Unlike the American Revolution, the Texas Revolution was a fraud.

Channing provided additional evidence of the illegitimacy of the Texas Revolution. He challenged the actual number of revolutionaries who lived in the Lone Star Republic, portraying the movement for independence as a sort of coup d'état launched by a small cadre of slaveholders rather than a major revolution launched by the people. He believed the Texan revolution could better be defined as an "insurrection" led by Americans living there. He wrote that those who raised "the standard of war" against Mexico was likely smaller than the number of discontents that could be found in the "suburbs of London," insisting that "their revolt may be compared to the rising of a county in Massachusetts or Virginia for the purpose of establishing a separate sovereignty."¹⁴ Dissent by such a small group of people, the antislavery leader stated, should not be allowed to turn into legitimate revolution—simply because it coincided with the interests of the planter class in the United States.

¹³ Channing, *A Letter on the Annexation of Texas to the United States*, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

Slavery, and the southerners who wanted to extend its reach, served as the foundation for Channing's critique of both the Texas Revolution and annexation. He understood that the complaints of Texans against the Mexican government revolved around the illegality of slavery. Channing admonished southerners who partook in "the project of dismembering a neighboring republic" in order to "overspread a region which had been consecrated to a free population" with slavery. He insisted that "men and money were thrown from the United States into that region to carry on the war of revolution," and in doing so, the United States violated international law by allowing its citizens to wage a war against Mexico.¹⁵ He warned that allowing private residents of the United States to serve as temporary revolutionaries set a precarious precedent for the nation. Adding Texas as another slave state would create an even more dangerous model for American expansion, the antislavery theologian feared.

Channing also worried that the annexation of Texas, after such close involvement in its revolution by Americans, would alter the precedent for United States declarations of war. He wrote, "Texas is a country conquered by our citizens; and the annexation of it to our Union will be the beginning of conquests which, unless arrested and beaten back by a just and Kind Providence, will stop only at the Isthmus of Darien." He warned that if the citizens of the United States—especially those in free states—accepted land for slavery by conquest, then wars for expansion would never stop. If Texas, he asked, then why not all of Mexico? If all of Mexico, then why not all of Central America? He wrote, "Our Eagle will whet, not gorge, its appetite on its first victim, and will snuff a more tempting quarry, more alluring blood, in every new region which opens southward." In summation,

¹⁵ Ibid., 12-14.

he said, "[to] annex Texas is to declare perpetual war with Mexico."¹⁶ Slaveholders would never stop pushing for greater expansion.

The New Englander told those who read his pamphlet that if they accepted the growth of slaveholding territory by the barrel of the gun, then they should be prepared for continual war, not just with their neighbors to the South, but also those to the north in Canada. Adding Texas to the Union, he argued, would only foster another war with England because "collision with the West Indies will be the most certain effect of the extension of our power in" the Gulf of Mexico. American planters, Channing stated, could not allow West Indian freedom to influence the slaveholding South; therefore, they would never "cultivate friendly sentiments towards communities whose whole history will be a bitter reproach to their institutions, a witness against their wrongs, and whose ardent sympathies will be enlisted in the cause of the slave."¹⁷ Instead they would use federal foreign policy to get their way. By pointing to the addition of Texas to the Union as a dangerous precedent, William Ellery Channing helped to create a template for moral opponents of slavery movement in particular, and the larger antislavery movement in general. He verbalized the protest of many northerners against a planter class that had realized the potential for slavery that came from controlling the machinery of a growing federal government.

Channing identified the Slave Power in 1837. He wrote, "In opening to ourselves vast regions, in which we may spread slavery, and in spreading it...the slave-holding States may bear rule in the national councils, we make slavery the predominant interest of

¹⁶ Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁷ Ibid., 26.

the State." Adding more territory would not just spread the evil of slavery across the North American continent, but also consolidate the proslavery movement's strength in the federal government. He predicted what slaveholders would do with their expanded power. By adding more slave states, Americans would make slavery "the basis of power, the spring or guide of public measures, the object for which the revenues, strength, and wealth of the country, are to be exhausted. Slavery will be branded on our front as the great idea, the prominent feature of the country. We shall renounce our high calling as a people, and accomplish the lowest destiny to which a nation can be bound."¹⁸ He maintained that if northerners willfully chose to add more slave territory to the Union, Americans could no longer blame their forefathers for planting slavery in the United States. Instead, the nation and the institution of bondage of blacks in the American South would remain imprinted upon the soul of the nation forever. Channing believed that an open broadcast of strong antislavery views might redirect the course of the nation and check the desire for American expansion. Channing would not be alone in his cause.

In 1837, while Channing worked to stir opposition to the annexation of Texas outside of Washington, John Quincy Adams worked inside the halls of the House of Representatives to accomplish the same end. Adams thought he could show how unpopular adding more slave territory was among northern citizens by pointing to petitions from roughly one hundred thousand Americans from free states arguing against Texas annexation, as well as several memorials passed by northern state legislatures from Maine to Michigan that opposed an American incorporation of the Lone Star Republic. Forced to follow the Gag Rule, however, the House had tabled the petitions without

¹⁸ Ibid., 30-31

debate. In one instance, a congressman from Ohio was not allowed to read a letter from his governor to the House of Representatives in Washington because it opposed adding Texas to the Union. In another, one northern state implored its congressional delegations to "protest against the admission of any new slave State or the annexation of Texas."¹⁹

As the recognized antislavery leader in the House of Representatives, John Quincy Adams offered a proposal regarding the future of slavery that would resonate for decades to come, in both the North and the South. He argued that preventing the addition of more slave territory to the United States would end slavery in North America, stating, "I believe, if Texas is not annexed to this Union, that the time is not remote when there will not be a slave either in these States or in Texas." His rationale was straightforward: "if Texas is excluded, in the first place she will operate as a drain for the slaves from South Carolina; and that that State will be so drained of its slave population that the white inhabitants, including the gentleman and his friends, will be the first to urge the propriety of abolition."²⁰

Southerners in the audience received the statement from Adams with laughter, but he ignored it. He believed that if Texas were excluded from the United States and squeezed between two free nations, that eventually, it would find itself becoming a free territory. What neither Adams nor Channing anticipated, however, was how their

¹⁹ *Speech of John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, Upon the Right of the People, Men and Women, to Petition; on the Freedom of Speech and of Debate in the House of Representatives of the United States; on the Resolutions of Seven State Legislatures and the Petitions of More Than One Hundred Thousand Petitioners, Relating to the Annexation of Texas to This Union* (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1938): 8-9, 30-38; Portsmouth, Nh. *Journal of Literature and Politics*, February 4, 1837; Hartford *Times*, February 4, 1837; Saratoga *Sentinel*, February 7, 1837; Hallowell, Me. *Cultivator* and Hallowell *Gazette*, June 6, 1840.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

arguments about draining slavery away from the American Southeast, or fighting a war with either Mexico or England, might be co-opted by those who wanted to add Texas to the Union. If annexationists could create a narrative that combined national defense (as well as national pride) with antiblack sentiment, they could successfully convince the nation to embrace their cause and support the addition of more slavery territory to the Union. The proslavery cause, by happenstance, would find itself in the position to do just that shortly following the inauguration of a new president in 1841.

With the economic Panic of 1837 dominating politics during the presidential campaign of 1840, adding Texas to the United States gained little traction. Both candidates—incumbent Martin Van Buren and newcomer William Henry Harrison—did not want to risk losing political standing by discussing such a divisive topic. As the first presidential candidate to actively campaign for the office, Harrison, “the Hero of Tippecanoe,” won the election and thereby ushered the first Whig president into the White House. In his two-hour inaugural address, which he delivered on a cold and rainy spring day in the nation’s capital, the new president never mentioned Mexico, Texas, or the expansion of American landholding in the West. Instead, the old general focused on Whig principles, paying particular attention to the role of government and the economic standing of the nation. Harrison portrayed himself as a president who prioritized internal improvements—much to the delight of his Whig party and especially Senator Henry Clay. For the first time since John Quincy Adams resided in the White House a different party than the Democrats assumed total control of the federal government, winning both

houses of Congress as well as the presidency.²¹

Illness struck the president just weeks after his inauguration. The old general and ninth president of the United States died thirty days after assuming office, on April 4, 1841. For the first time in history of the nation, the Vice President moved into the White House to fulfill the remainder of his running mate's term of office. For three years and eleven months, John Tyler, a Virginian aristocrat and former Democrat, would serve in the first Whig president's stead.²²

The death of the president so soon after his inauguration sent shock waves throughout Washington and the nation. As a leader of the antislavery movement in Congress, John Quincy Adams expressed in his diary the anxiety he felt that slavery still "festered" below the surface of American political life. He was greatly concerned about the role the southern institution would play in both the policy and politics practiced by Harrison's replacement, a man whom the former president deemed so unsuited for the office that he refused to grant him the actual title of president, referring to him instead as "Acting President of the United States." Adams believed that at the least, Tyler would actively work to protect slavery; at the worst, he would seek to expand it. On the day that William Henry Harrison died, Adams wrote in his diary that the man who would replace him was "a political sectarian, of the slave-driving, Virginia, Jeffersonian school, principled against all improvement, with all the interests and passions and vices of

²¹ Inaugural Address, Tuesday, March 4, 1841" in *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States from George Washington, 1789, to George Bush, 1989* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1989): 79-97. For examples of how Americans reacted to the Log Cabin and Hard Cider campaign see A.B. Norton, *Reminiscences of the Log Cabin and Hard Cider Campaign* (Dallas: A. B. Norton, 1888).

²² Norma Lois Peterson, *The Presidencies of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989): 31-44.

slavery rooted in his moral and political constitution—with talents not above mediocrity, and a spirit incapable of expansion to the dimensions of the station upon which he has been cast by the hand of Providence, unseen through the apparent agency of chance." The weather seemed to fit John Quincy's mood, he finished his entry for the day by noting, "This day was in every sense gloomy—rain the whole day."²³ He knew the inaugural address read to the nation just prior had suddenly been rendered meaningless. The man who now occupied the White House would never follow the plan Harrison had set for his presidency. Tyler—a slaveholder who supported the censoring of the abolitionists in 1838—would not adhere to the anti-expansionism of the Whig party.

As Adams had predicted, President John Tyler soon found himself at odds with his own party. Upon the death of President Harrison, Henry Clay, like John Quincy Adams, trivialized Tyler's position as president of the United States, dubbing the new commander-in-chief with the sobriquet of "His Accidency." Though Clay had been left off the top of the ticket in favor of Harrison, the Kentucky leader still believed he could shape the policy initiatives of the first Whig administration. The roadblock to internal improvements, in the form of Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, had at last been removed. Furthermore, the presidential cabinet remained filled with Old Tippecanoe's appointments loyal to the Whig Party. Finally, Clay thought, the national government could build infrastructure and create a more centralized banking system, both of which had been maligned under Democratic control of the executive's chair. Clay finally had his

²³ *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co, 1876): 10: 455-457. Other members of Congress also debated whether Tyler would remain the Vice President or ascend to the presidency. See *Congressional Globe*, 27 Cong, 1 sess., 3-4; Lyon Gardiner Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers in Two Volumes* (Richmond: Whittett and Shepperson, 1884): 1: 572-582.

chance to implement his vision.²⁴

Tyler had different plans for the nation's future. Soon after he assumed office, it became apparent that John Quincy Adams was accurate in his labeling of the new president as a man from the "Jeffersonian" or Democratic school of politics. Tyler, who had once referred to Clay as a "corruptionist" and praised Andrew Jackson's Maysville Road veto as "a good first step," showed his true colors after he assumed the duties of commander-in-chief. During the early months of his term, the new president vetoed a bill passed by the Whig-controlled Congress authorizing the resuscitation of the Bank of the United States, an institution despised by the followers of states' rights and beloved by those faithful to Clay. In his veto message, Tyler wrote, "I regard the bill as asserting for Congress the right to incorporate a United States Bank, with power and right to establish offices of discount and deposit in the several States of this Union, with or without their consent, a principle-to which I have always heretofore been opposed, and which can never obtain my sanction."²⁵

The president would stay true to his word. When Clay ushered through a banking bill that he hoped would satiate the president's states rights proclivities, Tyler vetoed it again, causing his entire cabinet (except Secretary of State Daniel Webster who was working to settle a border dispute between Maine and Canada while in Europe) to immediately resign in protest. With this, the president lost his party. After nearly two

²⁴ Edward P. Crapol, *John Tyler: The Accidental President* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 16-20; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol 1, 1776-1854, 362-364.

²⁵ John Tyler to Littleton W. Tazewell, May 28, 1830 in Lyon G. Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 1: 412; *Message from The President of the United States Transmitting with his Objections, the bill entitled, "An Act to incorporate the Subscribers to the Fiscal Bank of the United States,"* Senate Document 93, 27 Cong., 1 sess., 5.

years of acrimony between the Whigs and the president, Webster, too, quit his post. A longtime acquaintance and colleague of the new president from the Virginia state legislature, Abel P. Upshur, believed he could help John Tyler create a coalition of his own by urging the president to focus on the West. If his political message could be delivered in the right way, the president could create an organization all his own. He would seek help from his fellow comrades in the proslavery movement.²⁶

Born in Virginia and experienced in practicing both law and politics in the Old Dominion, Abel Upshur came to epitomize the dual nature of the proslavery movement following both the Nat Turner insurrection and the Abolitionist postal campaign. In the 1820s he had believed that slavery would eventually be ended in Virginia. During the 1830s, however, things changed. Like many slaveholders, Upshur had been heavily influenced by Thomas Dew's defense of slavery following Nat Turner's rebellion in Southampton. By the end of the decade, Upshur himself had written a long tract defending state rights against what he believed to be incursions by the federal government. By the turn of the decade, however, in the years before becoming Secretary of State, the Virginian changed his views once again. Rather than adhering to the states' rights of the Jeffersonian school, Upshur advocated the creation of a strong federal government that used its power to protect slavery nationally, while at the same time protecting the individual power of the states to regulate the southern institution. For him, like so many others in the 1840s, these two ideas regarding slavery did not clash.²⁷

²⁶ Freehling, *Road to Disunion* vol 1, 363-364; Claude H. Hall, *Abel P. Upshur: Conservative Virginian* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1964).

²⁷ [Abel P. Upshur], *A brief enquiry into the true nature and character of our Federal Government: being a review of Judge Story's Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* (Petersburg: Edmund and Julian C. Ruffin, 1840); Hall, *Abel P. Upshur*, 69-105.

In 1839 Upshur joined the chorus of slaveholders who believed that proslavery forces needed to control the machinery of the federal government in order to protect slavery. The first step, he wrote in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, was for southern politicians to turn slavery into a matter that concerned more than just the planter class of the South. He wrote, "We have been in the habit of contemplating [slavery] rather as a domestic than as a political institution." Change had come to American politics, he told southerners. He continued, "It is fortunate for us that we are no longer permitted to view [slavery] in so imperfect a light. It is as a political institution that it possesses the highest interest to us, and in that character only I propose now to consider it."²⁸ The time had come, he argued, for slaveholders to realize that slavery was indeed something more than a cultural staple of the American South.

Abel Upshur, like many people who write about political philosophy, based his ideas in part on his imagined projection of America's future. His outlook could easily be described as pessimistic in the long term. All free societies eventually perished, he proclaimed in "Domestic Slavery." The only real project for a free people was to lengthen its period of free government. In this task, Americans had an advantage that many other free people in civilizations before them had not had—a unique structure of government aimed at protecting the liberty of those it deemed free. He stated, "In contemplating the future decline of liberty in the United States, it cannot escape us that there is a want of perfect analogy between our republics and those of every other age and country." American exceptionalism established at the nation's founding by the Constitution served as the bedrock for protecting America's free society. He continued: "Our form of

²⁸ Abel Upshur, "Domestic Slavery," *Southern Literary Messenger* 5 (October 1839): 677.

government has no example among [the rest of the world]; it is peculiar in its structure, and we may well hope that it is much more solidly founded and better balanced," a balance that allowed for federal strength with local control over particular interests.²⁹

However, it was not just the composition of American government or the exceptional nature of the country's founding that safeguarded liberty in the nation, Upshur declared. Slavery also played an essential role in securing liberty for whites in America. He explained to the readers of the *Southern Literary Messenger* that American slavery itself was exceptional when compared to other slaveholding republics throughout history. While ancient civilizations acquired slaves through war with their neighbors, American planters found class stability in the explicitly racial division of the workforce. He wrote, "Our safety is in the color of the slave; in an external ineffaceable distinction of nature. With us, there is no margin in the word *manumitto*, which transmutes the slave into the free citizen." The implication of his statements would be obvious to those who read his message: in trying to free the slaves, abolitionists hoped to undermine American exceptionalism and fall into the traps that had brought down free republics in the past. Southern slaveholders fused slavery to the American belief that their nation was different from the rest of the world. Near the end of his article, he argued that American freedom would last the longest in the South because of its unique slave system. Upshur concluded, "To my mind it is clear, that in this country Liberty is destined to perish a suicide; she will owe her destruction to her own excesses alone. And perish when she may, I am much deceived if her last entrenchment, her latest abiding place, will not be found in the slave-

²⁹ Ibid., 684-687.

holding states."³⁰

Unlike societies without slavery, where labor and capital opposed each other and threatened to collapse the entire system, he argued, slavery served as the most stable system of labor because "the last man with whom the slave would unite, is his overseer." Upshur did not, however, avoid the obvious truth that slavery could become dangerous—especially in times of war. Instead he reassured his readership that "a very small squadron, prepared to march promptly and rapidly to any point of danger, would be sufficient to put down the best planned servile insurrection."³¹ As long as the military could protect slavery, liberty for whites would last longer in America than in any other place. For Abel Upshur, slavery had become a good that helped secure American liberty from a tumultuous class revolution seen in places like France so long as the slave-based society received protection from uprisings and outsiders. This ideology would play a major role in his thinking while he served the Tyler administration.

When Upshur first arrived in Washington as Tyler's head of the Navy, many in the political class believed him to be both an extreme states rights disciple and an ardent defender of slavery. One Ohio newspaper described the new Secretary of the Navy as someone who "has zealous ideas of the beauty and utility of the slavery system, and can knock down any man living upon the theory of that point." Political watchers, however, soon discovered that Upshur's worldview rested on the conviction that a strong federal government could go hand in hand with protection of slavery. Once the Virginian started his new job, he actively employed the machinery of the federal government to protect

³⁰ Ibid., 686-687.

³¹ Ibid., 682.

slavery by strengthening its power and promoting reforms within the Navy that created a stronger standing military presence. Once he became Secretary of State following Daniel Webster's resignation, Upshur, along with the president, began promoting ideas that stretched constitutional limits in order to protect U.S. slavery from a world that appeared to be turning against it.³²

President Tyler, along with his handpicked cabinet, understood that Americans, or at least an electoral majority of them, would only resist the temptation of expansion for so long. Many Americans wanted to add more land to their nation, but no party willingly took action in facilitating those ends. The president—and therefore Tyler's—role as leader of American foreign policy gave him a chance to fill the void. Texas offered a convenient way to gain popularity among the people despite the lack of enthusiasm he received from both the Whigs and Democrats in Washington. Soon after rising to the presidency, Tyler sent an agent to England in order to gauge that nation's interest in connecting itself closer to Texas. Thus the man no one thought would ever be president initiated a plan to add land to the United States that his predecessors worried could contribute to the sectionalism that simmered below the surface of American politics in the 1840s.³³

³² The actions Upshur took with the Navy are discussed more fully in chapter 4 of this dissertation. See also Matthew J. Karp, "Slavery and American Sea Power: The Navalist Impulse in the Antebellum South," *The Journal of Southern History* vol 87 (May 2011): 284-324; Claude H. Hall, "Abel P. Upshur and the Navy As An Instrument of Foreign Policy," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 69, (July 1961): 290-299; Columbus *The Ohio State Journal*, September 29, 1841.

³³ Numerous books have discussed Texas Annexation and its impact on the sectionalism. The most notable being Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972); Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire, Revised Edition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985): 10-54; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. 1, 353-440; Joel H. Silbey, *Storm Over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) All note the importance that Texas Annexation played in the coming of the Civil War, but rarely, if at all, mention the movement for annexation resulting from the new turn in the proslavery

Throughout 1843 and 1844, Texas annexation reemerged in the public consciousness, prodded on by the president and his supporters. The issue initially reappeared in the form of a letter by Thomas Gilmer, a friend of Tyler, which had been published in *The Madisonian*, the pro-administration newspaper out of the nation's capital, in January 1843. Gilmer, elected to the House of Representatives as a Whig from Virginia, offered the first signs that the proslavery movement would continue to use the federal government to protect and expand slavery by cloaking it with the language of national prosperity and defense of the Union—tasks the public perceived as directly corresponding with the divided powers of the Constitution.³⁴

Calling slavery "a subject of extreme delicacy," Gilmer understood the importance the institution would play in American opinions towards the annexation of Texas. He perceived the sectional tension that both presidents Jackson and Van Buren sensed immediately following the Texas Revolution and knew the proslavery movement needed to nationalize the issue in order to gain some sympathy in the North. Antislavery leaders, after all, had not stopped their opposition to adding more slave territory to the United States. Again, William Ellery Channing, during the final weeks before his death, spoke for many citizens in the North when he tied William Lloyd Garrison's cry of "No Union with Slaveholders!" to annexation. Speaking in Lenox, Massachusetts, the theologian fortified his opposition to slavery, declaring that free states should not be held liable for the evils of slavery and saying, "Better that we should part, than be the police of

movement that favored using a powerful federal government to promote and defend slavery in the aftermath of the 1830s as well as its direct connection to the Wilmot Proviso, which will be discussed in chapter 6.

³⁴ Washington, D.C., *The Daily Madisonian*, January 23, 1843; *Houston Telegraph*, February 15, 1843. Gilmer's letter was initially published in the *Baltimore Republican and Argus*, January 19.

the slave-holder, than fight his battles, than wage war to uphold an oppressive institution." Channing could see how the proslavery movement had adjusted itself over time, incorporating the power of the federal government and pointing to the movement for Texas as evidence of this new tactic.³⁶

Channing continued his speech by declaring, "So I say, let the Union be dissevered, rather than receive Texas into the confederacy. This measure, besides entailing on us evils of all sorts, would have for its chief end, to bring the whole country under the slave power, to make the General Government the agent of slavery." Little over a week after its initial publication, Garrison's *Liberator* published correspondence that further warned the antislavery movement to be prepared to push back against Texas annexation, criticizing Gilmer for masking the proslavery movement with the cloak of nationalism. Abolitionists like Channing and Garrison, as well as those who supported them throughout the free states, prepared themselves to do all they could to block the expansion of slavery territory.³⁷

Just as they had during the Haitian Revolution, British emancipation of the West Indies, and the abolitionist postal campaign, the proslavery movement needed to find a way to convince those lacking antislavery moral sentiment in the North to join their cause by painting Texas annexation as an act that directly promoted or benefited the entire nation, not just southern slavery. Gilmer alluded to how much the North, especially the Midwest, would gain from annexation. He explained that adding "the unusually fertile

³⁶ Washington, D.C., *The Daily Madisonian*, January 23, 1843; Joseph Barker, ed., *The Works of William Ellery Channing in Six Volumes* (London: Chapman, 1845): VI: 83-84.

³⁷ Joseph Barker, ed., *The Works of William Ellery Channing in Six Volumes* (London: Chapman, 1845): VI: 83-84; *The Liberator*, February 3, 1843.

territory" would benefit the free states more than the slave South. Texas, he argued, would "be rapidly peopled" by Americans who would "open a market at home for the manufactures and agricultural products of all the non-slaveholding States," otherwise something that would only be available "under the restrictions and disadvantages of foreign competition," costing the free states thousands of dollars. Gilmer asserted that only the South could oppose adding Texas due to economic concerns, writing that annexation "would foster a competition for which it could find no immediate equivalent, except in the vast acquisition of national wealth, prosperity, and harmony which would result."³⁸ Adding Texas would be a big win for the North, the Virginian maintained.

The congressman hoped to portray slaveholders as patriotic supporters of annexation for the benefit of the Union. However, Gilmer also unwittingly fulfilled Channing's prophecy that expansionists would not be satisfied with gaining Texas alone. He argued that America was ready to reach for greatness, and thus, for unlimited expansion: "Our federative Union, in the spirit of its adoption, is capable of indefinite extension. Space and numbers will only add to its blessings."³⁹ The southern Whig hoped national pride would inspire those in the North to join him in soliciting the federal government to take action regarding Texas, despite it being slave territory.

More than patriotism, however, would be needed in order to convince enough northerners to join Tyler's new coalition in favor of expansion westward. Two particular issues worked to persuade some in the free states that America should expand its borders. The first was anti-black sentiment. Gilmer vaguely touched on this concern in his letter

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

about Texas, arguing, "The culture of cotton and sugar in the United States has done more to withdraw slavery southward, than all the expedients which the wisdom of this or other generations could devise."⁴⁰ His implication for those in the North, many of whom had an aversion to black people, was clear: adding Texas to the nation would force blacks to move out west, away from the Upper South and the North. This idea would evolve over the years into an effective weapon in the debate over slavery.

The second subject used by those who wanted to add the Lone Star Republic to the Union involved America's old foe, England, and its abolitionism. Gilmer made this point explicitly, stating, "The prejudices of England against slavery are philosophically confined to sympathetic meetings, popular harangues, and a neighborly disposition to see us dissolve our union on account of it." Americans, together, should worry about what the English had planned in Texas and Mexico. He continued, "England, whose possessions and jurisdictions extend over so large a portion of the globe, whose influence is felt every where, will either possess or control Texas, if it does not come under the jurisdiction of the United States."⁴¹ Gilmer did not let the threat of possible crisis go to waste. Without quick action, the congressman urged to his fellow citizens, danger loomed ahead. During the 1830s proslavery forces outside the presidency had used emancipation in the West Indies as a way to actively promote the use of the federal government to bolster the defense of slavery in the United States. The topic of annexation fit into this template neatly, and the Tyler administration—partially propagandizing but also genuinely concerned that England did indeed have plans for Texas—used this information to

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

promote annexation as a safety measure.⁴²

Concerns from the Tyler administration over English machinations in Texas did not stem from sudden twisting of the facts. The southerners in charge of American diplomacy based their ideas on the concerns slaveholders in the South had felt for nearly half of a century. In 1841 American slaveholders butted heads with England once again. This time, the enslaved aboard the *Creole* had rebelled against the slave traders holding them in bondage. After securing the ship, they sailed to Nassau in the Bahamas where, over American protests, the English governor freed every slave held on board. Thus, when Gilmer warned readers to be wary of Great Britain's abolitionism, he only made public the tensions Americans in and out of the White House felt and had discussed in anxious correspondence to each other. England, they believed, wanted to control Texas in order to end slavery. Therefore, in the early months after his rise to office, John Tyler tasked Duff Green, a former editor of the Washington *Telegraph* and loyal ally to John C. Calhoun, to work as his agent in England. Planning to capitalize on the Texas annexation issue, the president wanted to gauge the exact mood in England regarding the Lone Star Republic.⁴³

After arriving in England in December 1841, a month after the *Creole* incident, Green quickly set out to accomplish this task. During his time in Europe, he reported back to the United States that the British Empire planned to create a commercial monopoly by controlling the oceans and expanding its landholdings in North America to

⁴² Sam W. Haynes, "Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas: The Quest For National Security," in eds Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997): 115-145.

⁴³ W. Stephen Belko, *The Invincible Duff Green: Whig of the West* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006): 332-333; Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 108-111.

encompass California and Oregon, giving them a stronger foothold in the Pacific. He believed England feared both American manufacturing in the North as well as the power that southern cotton gave to the United States on the world market. Green wrote to his confidant and mentor, John C. Calhoun, that England found "it impossible to maintain her commercial and manufacturing superiority, because she cannot raise cotton, sugar &c., as cheap in India as it can be raised in the United States, Cuba, and Brazil."⁴⁴ He believed that England wanted to use its military strength to reshape the composition of the global economy.

The abolitionists weakened the British Empire, Green told his mentor. "Her war on slavery and the slave-trade is intended to increase the cost of producing the raw material in the United States, Brazil, and Cuba" in order to further profit from the East India Company. He concluded with the proslavery theory that England pursued abolitionism not out of moral reasons, but rather economic necessity, writing, "you will find that England has much more than a work of benevolence in the suppression of the slave-trade." He told the senator from South Carolina, as well as the president, that Americans needed to be prepared for war—just as Upshur had argued only a few years before, when he tried to strengthen the Navy.⁴⁵

By 1843 John C. Calhoun made it a high priority to find a way to use federal authority to add Texas to the Union. Throughout the next year, the South Carolinian received other worrisome letters that seemed to build on the fears that many southern

⁴⁴ Duff Green to John C. Calhoun, January 24, 1842 in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Clyde N. Wilson, 14: 83-87; Belko, *The Invincible Duff Green*, 336-341; Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008): 167-171.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

slaveholders felt regarding the supposed Abolitionist Power. Abel Upshur, who in July 1843 became secretary of state after Daniel Webster joined the rest of Harrison's cabinet in resignation, wrote to Calhoun echoing the fears of slaveholders originally sparked in the 1830s. He stated, "There can be no doubt, I think, that England is determined to abolish slavery throughout the American continent and islands, if she can. It is worse than childish, to suppose that she mediates this great movement, simply from an impulse of philanthropy." The United States needed to act against anticipated antislavery aggression, just as they had done after emancipation in the Caribbean and the Abolitionist postal campaign. In the minds of powerful slaveholders in control of the federal government, Texas was the perfect place to take a stand.

Abel Upshur, fearful of both slave insurrections in the South and intervention by England, grew more determined to bind Texas to the Union. English meddling in Texas, he wrote to John C. Calhoun shortly after becoming the nation's chief diplomat, "is the beginning of her operations upon us. If she should succeed, the slaves of Louisiana and Arkansas, will find an asylum in Texas and it will be impossible to prevent them from seeking it. *This government will not do any thing to aid the slave-holder*, and of course, he will take the matter into his own hands. He will reclaim his slave by force and this will lead to—*war*."⁴⁶

Upshur's trust in slavery's northern allies had been shaken over the past decade. He wrote that a war with England had the potential to be disastrous for the South, because "the Northern States will not aid in a war, waged for such a cause, and this will

⁴⁶ Abel Upshur to John C. Calhoun, August 14, 1843 in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, 17: 354-357.

lead to a separation of the Union."⁴⁷ After the abolitionist postal campaign, many powerful slaveholders began to distrust those in the free states. Anything short of an active defense of slavery, for some planters, signified a willingness to aid and abet the "fanatics" that hoped to sow insurrection among the slave population. Within this conspiratorial worldview, slaveholders in the administration clung to the annexation of Texas as a way to protect the slave South.

John C. Calhoun also embraced Texas annexation as an incredibly significant issue for the future of slavery. Besides receiving letters from Duff Green, the former nullifier also heard from Ashbel Smith, the Texas minister to England and future regent at the University of Texas. Smith warned that England would destroy slavery in Texas and create a nightmare for southern planters, especially on the western border. He wrote, "I sincerely believe that the ultimate purpose is to make Texas a refuge for runaway slaves from the United States, and eventually a negro nation, a sort of Hayti on the continent" that would be protected by the British government.⁴⁸ Visions of black soldiers marching through Louisiana no doubt filled the South Carolinian's mind. The danger of Haiti had been enough for southern planters to take action at the turn of the century, when Calhoun had been just a young man, but old enough to remember the fear that insurrection sparked in his native Palmetto State. The prospects of the slave states being neighbored by black nations to both the southeast and west, along with the growing abolitionist threat to the north simmering in the free states and to the south in the West Indies, no doubt frightened Calhoun. He and other slaveholders in powerful positions,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ashbel Smith to John C. Calhoun, June 19, 1843 in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, 17: 252-253

residing both in and out of Texas, became convinced that the only way to ensure their safety would be to make sure that the Lone Star Republic became the Lone Star State.

Upshur understood that admitting Texas as a slave state "would be received, at first, with a brush of repugnance" from northerners. He determined that it was his and other annexationists' duty to explain why protecting southern slavery from England had become necessary for those living in the free states as well as slave states. He hoped that "the more the subject is reflected on, the more clearly will [northerners] see that the measure is absolutely necessary. To the South, it is a question of *safety*; to the North, it is one of interest."⁴⁹ Southerners needed to find a way to regain support from those in the free states who did not object to slavery on moral grounds.

While serving as President Tyler's chief diplomat, Upshur felt pressure from England he could not keep to himself. John C. Calhoun was not his only confidant in relating his fears that England had begun pursuing the course of universal emancipation. He also sent an urgent letter to the United States minister to Great Britain, Edward Everett, which stated, "The movements of Great Britain, with respect to African slavery, have at length assumed a character which demands the serious attention of this Government." He believed that "There are many and strong reasons for believing that the abolition of domestic slavery throughout the continent and islands of America is a leading object in the present policy of England." Though the president "would be reluctant to believe that any design unfriendly to this country...enters into the policy of England," Upshur thought it his duty to convince the president otherwise because "the

⁴⁹ Ibid.

bare suspicion " that England wanted to free the enslaved of the United States was "calculated to excite, and in this instance has actually excited a very strong sensation among our people."⁵⁰ The Abolitionist Power could undermine the system of slavery simply through language, without using any force, just as it had during the abolitionist postal campaign. Indirect action by the antislavery movement could light the spark that fired a full-blown insurrection.

In a different letter to Everett, postmarked on the same day as his first but marked "confidential," Abel Upshur explained how devastated the South especially, and the United States as a whole, would become if slavery were to end in the slave states. He told the American minister to England that three-fourths of American exports derived from enslaved labor. However, he also included northern interests, writing, "There is still another interest which must share largely in this ruin. The vast capital now employed in manufacture of cotton goods must sink in value in proportion as the labor which produces the raw material shall be withdrawn."⁵¹ The entire nation, not simply the slaveholders or the slave states, he maintained, was connected by slavery whether the North, and the abolitionists, liked it or not. This became the message that the secretary and others in the proslavery movement began to spread.

Americans needed to ensure that Britain remained out of Texas because, as Upshur wrote, "It is obvious that slavery could not easily be maintained in a country surrounded by other countries whose Governments did not recognize that institution."

⁵⁰ Abel P. Upshur to Edward Everett, 28, 1843 in William R. Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Series, 1831-1860* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1936): 6-11.

⁵¹ Abel P. Upshur to Edward Everett, September 28, 1843 in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 11-17.

While many in the North were "as much opposed to the institution as England itself," their opposition remained different from English territories like Canada because the American Constitution had, from its inception, protected slavery by making it a reserved right of each state. It never formed, as Canada did in the 1840s, an area "whose Government did not recognize" the South's peculiar labor system. Despite any and all objections, the Constitution continued to protect the slaveholder, and "the absconding slave, therefore, has many chances against him before he can reach Canada."⁵² America's federal system therefore worked to the advantage of the master class by protecting the South from a North that seemed to be growing more antislavery by the day.

Without Texas, however, Upshur maintained, the *Creole* incident still fresh in his memory, the tables turned against the United States. He wrote, "Texas, however, lies immediately on the border of Louisiana and Arkansas. The slave would have nothing more to do than simply to cross the Sabine or the Red River, and he would find himself a free man." In direct opposition to the stance of William Ellery Channing, therefore, the Virginian argued that war would undoubtedly result if the Texas Republic fell under British influence, stating, "Scenes of violence and collision between the people of the two countries would be of almost daily occurrence; resentments would be kindled; and a war *de facto* would prevail," a war between the entire nation of the United States and England, not just the South, he insisted.⁵³

The threat of war with the British Empire, along with the understanding that many in the free states felt little sympathy for blacks—enslaved or free—would serve as the

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

basis for arguments in favor of annexation. Though Upshur saw this, he would never live to see his goals realized. Just days after his greatest achievement—pressuring President Sam Houston of Texas with an ultimatum that ultimately added the Lone Star Republic to the Union—Upshur, the former Secretary of the Navy, decided to join the president and the new Secretary of the Navy, Thomas Gilmer, on a tour of a new sloop-of-war, the *Princeton*. Armed with a newly designed cannon, the ship cruised along the Potomac River in February 1844. President Tyler stayed below the deck, delayed by dignitaries wanting to talk to the president, and missing the show planned by Gilmer, Upshur, and a host of others to celebrate the ship's tour and guests of honor. After firing off the cannon, nicknamed the Peacemaker, more than once to entertain those on board, Gilmer talked the reluctant captain into firing the gun just one additional time. Advising those watching to open their mouths to avoid concussion, the secretary of the Navy, standing with Upshur near the cannon, ordered the gun to be fired. Instantly, a flash appeared as the gun exploded violently. The Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Navy, and many others, including other members of Congress and several sailors, died instantly from the blast. With this disaster aboard the *Princeton*, annexationists suddenly lost two major proponents of their goals for acquiring Texas. Others, however, would soon take Gilmer and Upshur's place, showing the force of their new brand of proslavery politics.⁵⁴

Once the chief advocate in the Tyler administration was gone, the proslavery, pro-annexation movement found a much-needed voice in Senator Robert J. Walker. A Democrat from Mississippi, Walker took up the cause in Congress and in the media of explaining to northerners the importance of adding Texas to the Union. He knew, as

⁵⁴ Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur*, 209-213.

Upshur and other pro-annexationists did, that with just a fraction of solidarity from those who lived in the free states, Texas could join the Union despite antislavery opposition. Doubts about adding Texas as another slave state, however, still lingered in many parts of the nation. By the beginning of 1844, Senator Walker became determined to change the minds of those in the free states who still remained undecided. He published what soon became the cornerstone of the proslavery movement's argument for making Texas part of the United States of America.⁵⁵

Robert Walker had charisma that could induce the most reluctant opponent to join his side of a debate. Subsequent to practicing law in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Walker, in his mid-twenties, moved to Mississippi to work in a successful practice in Natchez. Nine years later, Mississippi elected him as the first Yankee to serve in the Senate from their state. Like Channing's anti-Texas message a few years before, the senator published his argument in favor of annexation in the form of a letter, replying to a group of citizens from Carroll County, Kentucky, who had asked for his opinion on the issue. In a roughly thirty-page response, the Mississippi Democrat laid out an argument that would successfully convince many northerners in his own party—now in control of the House of Representatives after scoring victory in the North—to back annexation. Copies of Walker's letter spread across the country, both North and South, in newspapers and in pamphlets. Wealthy southerners even created a "Texas Fund" that served, along with Senator Walker's franking privilege, to finance its publication and circulate his pamphlet by the thousands. Robert Walker, and the promises he made, would play a pivotal role in

⁵⁵ Frederick Merk, *Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) and Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* both argue that much of what the pro-annexationists from the South argued was purely propaganda. Merk's calling of Walker's pamphlet propaganda is repeated in Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, vol 1, 418.

northerners' response to the expansionist impulse of the 1840s.⁵⁶

The key components of Walker's letter were a natural consequence of the transformation of proslavery ideology. Whereas the movement had previously viewed the federal government with suspicion, it too embraced the power and duty of the government to protect slavery. Drawing on the concerns and ideas of Gilmer and Upshur, the senator molded an argument for annexation based on two fundamental principles that transcended sectional lines—securing the safety of the Union from foreign aggression and protecting the white republic. First, however, Walker needed to undermine the position of his opponents, especially those Congress like John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay. He helped to shake some of their standing by pointing to their respective legacies as president and former secretary of state and reminding the nation that both these popular leaders had not always so opposed gaining land in Texas.

In the beginning of his appeal for the acceptance of Texas into the Union, the Mississippi Senator argued that the territory had never actually left. He maintained that Texas at no time ever truly belonged to Mexico and should always have been part American landholding as a piece of the Louisiana Purchase. He contended, "Our right to Texas, as a part of Louisiana, was asserted and demonstrated by Presidents Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and John Quincy Adams. No one of our Presidents has ever doubted

⁵⁶ Robert J. Walker, *Letter of Mr. Walker, of Mississippi, Relative to the Annexation of Texas: In Reply to the Call of the People of Carroll County, Kentucky, to Communicate His Views on that Subject* (Washington: The Globe Office, 1844); Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 9-10; Thomas B. Alexander, *Sectional Stress and Party Strength: A Study of Roll-Call Voting Patterns in the United States House of Representatives, 1836-1860* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967): 51; James P. Shenton, *Robert John Walker: A Politician From Jackson to Lincoln* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961): 1-21.

our title; and Mr. Clay has ever maintained it as clear and unquestionable."⁵⁷ By turning the issue from the "annexation" to the "re-annexation" of Texas, Walker transcended sectional tensions brought on by slavery and turned it into an issue of national pride. He also undercut those like William Ellery Channing, who argued against the morality of launching the Texas Revolution as a quasi-war of conquest. After all, Americans who fought against Mexico were only defending territory that rightfully belonged to the United States.

However, unlike his predecessors from the proslavery movement, Walker also directly engaged in a public discussion of slavery, race, and the role that Texas would play in protecting not just the South, but also the nation as a whole. For the first time, he created a singular, synthesized argument that could be repeated ad nauseum by annexationists. Just as Thomas Jefferson in 1776 had pointed to "domestic insurrections amongst us" and endeavors "to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages" against Americans in the Declaration of Independence, Walker stated that Native Americans could be stifled in their attacks against American citizens through annexation. Without Texas, he claimed, the nation would "surrender" the "Red river, and Arkansas, and their numerous tributaries, for thousands of miles, to a foreign power. It brings that power upon the Gulf, within a day's sail of the mouth of the Mississippi, and in the interior, by the curve of the Sabine, within about one hundred miles of the Mississippi." Texas could not be trusted to those who did not hold American interests in highest regard. Its proximity to the American South empowered foreign nations to be "in

⁵⁷ Walker, *Letter of Mr. Walker, of Mississippi, Relative to the Annexation of Texas*, 5. Walker is being slightly disingenuous in claiming that John Quincy Adams supported that acquisition of Texas as he was the American author of the Adams-Onís Treaty that traded Florida for Texas in 1819 while serving as Secretary of State.

immediate contact with sixty thousand Indian warriors of our own, and with many thousand of the fiercest savage tribes in Texas, there to be armed and equipped for the work of death and desolation."⁵⁸ Though he referred to "a foreign power" and thus avoided the specific issue of England and its abolitionism, he did express to his readers that without Texas, not only would enslaved blacks be inspired to insurrection by abolitionists, but Indians armed by the largest empire in the world would also rise up against their old foe.

Walker also disputed the American antislavery movement's loyalty to the United States. He wrote, "The avowed object of this party is the immediate abolition of slavery. For this, they traverse sea and land; for this, they hold conventions in the capital of England; and there they brood over schemes of abolition in association with British societies; there they join in denunciations of their countrymen, until their hearts are filled with treason; and they return home, Americans in name, but Englishmen in feelings and principles."⁵⁹ He further argued that the goal of the abolitionists was to overthrow the government and dissolve the Union, thus not only challenging the existence of American democracy itself, but also the idea of American exceptionalism that many in the North held dear.

Northerners feared that the addition of Texas, with the possibility that it could be separated into many slave states, would allow the South to gain an upper hand in national politics, both in the Senate and through the electoral college system of presidential elections. They worried that the entire federal system that balanced the power between

⁵⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

the two sections would collapse. In response to those concerns, the Massachusetts legislature passed a resolution calling for an amendment to the Constitution that removed the three-fifths compromise, believing that it gave southerners an overrepresentation in Congress. Walker was ready with an answer.⁶⁰

To mitigate northern concerns that Texas might increase the power of slave states in the federal government, he promised that "reannexation" would "only change the locality of the slaves, and of the slaveholding states, without augmenting their number." Slaves would move farther away from the North without strengthening the power of the slave states that already existed in the Union. Abolitionists who prophesied wars over slavery overstated their sense of doom. While adding another large slave state seemed to strengthen the Slave Power, as Channing argued, the evidence he provided, the Mississippi senator said, was only circumstantial and did not include anticipations of black immigration, both free and enslaved, away from the North and Upper South that would create more free states dominated by a white population. In fact, Walker contended, the Union would be protected against sectionalism because the new state in the Southwest would draw slaves away from the nation's capital. Washington D.C. would be free of slaves within twelve years, he promised, "and that question, which now occupies so much of the time of Congress, and threatens so seriously the harmony, in not the existence of the union, would be put at rest by the annexation of Texas."⁶¹ Adding the Lone Star Republic to the United States was, therefore, an attack against the sectionalism that had boiled to the surface of American politics in the 1830s.

⁶⁰ Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 127-128; *House Documents*, 28th Cong., 1. sess. (serial 446), no 404, 125-144.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

Many other proslavery members of Congress who argued in favor of the acquisition of Texas utilized Walker's argument that the Upper South would soon become free territory, and it soon became the annexationists' favorite talking point. Senator James Buchanan, representing Pennsylvania, told fellow northerners in Congress, "I yet feel a strong repugnance, by any act of mine, to extend the present limits of the Union over a new slaveholding territory." Yet, following Walker's assertion, Buchanan also explained, "The acquisition of Texas would ere long convert Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, and probably others of the more northern slave States into free States, I entertain no doubt."⁶² Acquiring Texas as part of the United States would not challenge the balance of power between the free states and the slave states. If the promises of Robert Walker and those who parroted his pamphlet came true, more free states than slave states would be created by Texas annexation.

In his *Letter*, the senator from Mississippi built on Thomas Gilmer's notion that the North depended on slavery just as much as the South in order to make ends meet. After repeating the claim that northern manufacturing depended on raw materials grown from the South, he also added that slaveholders served as customers for northern businesses. Ending slavery immediately, as the abolitionists demanded, would have ruinous consequences for the North. Walker said that with emancipation, the North could expect "one universal bankruptcy" that "would overspread the country, together with all the demoralization and crime which ever accompany such a catastrophe." He argued that ending slavery would not just leave northerners poor, but also hungry. Beggars, he

⁶² *Congressional Globe* 28 Cong., 1 sess., 722.

claimed, "would ask us in the streets, not for money, but for bread."⁶³ The proslavery voice in favor of Texas annexation therefore hoped to use anxiety over an unsettled future without slavery to bring some of the population in the free states to his side by claiming that blacks, free and enslaved, who many in the North saw as a threat to their society, would be moved southwestward, creating a whiter—and for many whites, a safer—society in the eastern part of the United States.

The economic consequences of emancipation, however, would be the furthest thing from the minds of the white North if abolitionists got their way, the senator from Mississippi claimed. The beggars that Walker prophesied would appear in the free states would not just be northern whites who lost their jobs. Blacks would also immigrate to the North without any preparation for participating in a free society. Without their masters to control the black population in the South, the former Pennsylvania lawyer proclaimed, northern whites would watch as the black population, fleeing their former masters, inundated their cities and towns while having no place to live or work because of their lack of skills. Texas joining the Union, he stressed, played a vital role in keeping blacks away from the free states where many in the white population already despised them. In the final section of his polemic, Robert Walker resurrected the old idea that had been discussed by the planter class on numerous occasions after the American Revolution, when slavery in the United States faced a challenge in the form of an insurrection or foreign emancipation. The West offered a place for excess slaves, a place to which a group of people that many nonslaveholders wanted their society to have little connection

⁶³ Walker, *Letter of Mr. Walker, of Mississippi, Relative to the Annexation of Texas*, 13.

with, could be sent.⁶⁴

Walker's *Letter* represented one of the first times in the debate over annexation when the discussion moved beyond just Texas and developed into an entire doctrine regarding the expansion of slavery westward and southward. He claimed that the expansion of American slavery to the Southwest would create a kind of safety valve for excess slaves—something that the colonies in the West Indies never could have achieved because of the nature of their government and their isolation as islands. However, the safety-valve thesis did not just pertain to the South and the slave states; it also involved the protection of the white population of the North, many of whom felt racial hatred toward blacks regardless of their status as a slave, former slave, or free man in a free state. Walker wrote, "The slaves being emancipated, not by the South, but by the North, would fly there for safety and protection; and three millions of free blacks would be thrown at once, as if by a convulsion nature, upon the States of the North."⁶⁵ Texas annexation would act as a vessel to keep free blacks away from the states above the Mason-Dixon Line by encouraging immigration to the Southwest.

The genius of Walker's *Letter*, from a proslavery point of view, was that it made the entire nation accountable for slavery because it connected the federal expansion of slavery to positive consequences for the country as a whole, without forcing slavery onto free localities. Having grown up in the northeastern state of Pennsylvania, the senator from Mississippi was attuned to the racial sensitivities of the North. He understood that white workers in the free states, cherishing their whiteness, felt antipathy towards blacks

⁶⁴ Ibid., 11-17 Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 12.

who might compete for their jobs and also valued the nation as a white republic. Walker played on those feelings in order to gain support for annexation specifically, and for slavery broadly, in the North. He insisted that if blacks immigrated to the North, the price of wages for white laborers would diminish as they had to compete against blacks for work "whilst the poor-house and the jail, the asylums of the dead and dumb, the blind, the idiot and insane, would be filled to overflowing; if, indeed, any asylum could be afforded to the millions of the negro race whom wretchedness and crime would drive to despair and madness." He further added that the loss of the Texas market and the "immense free black population" would force white workers to see that their "wages would be reduced until they would fall to ten or twenty cents a day, and starvation and misery would be introduced among the white laboring population."⁶⁶ Whites who already held disparaging views of blacks would have little sympathy for the expansion of black enslavement at the expense of their jobs.

To ensure that his readers understood that other northerners joined him in his beliefs regarding abolitionism and slavery, Walker cited two speeches given by free-state politicians during the last session of Congress. First, he pointed to the words of a New Yorker. Quoting a speech delivered in Congress in 1843 by Richard Davis, a Democrat from Poughkeepsie, Walker wrote that even northerners understood "the abolition of slavery in the southern States must be followed by a deluge of black population to the North, filling our jails and our poor houses, and bringing destruction upon the laboring

⁶⁶ *Letter of Mr. Walker, of Mississippi, Relative to the Annexation of Texas*, 5; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class, Revised Edition* (New York: Verso, 2007): 43-64; Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 2003): 95-182. Walker seems to disregard how white laborers in the South would react to this point.

portion of our people."⁶⁷ Informed northerners too, Walker exhorted, thought that emancipation would only bring trouble for the free states.

Secondly, after using the controversial census of 1840 to show the rise of insanity and crime among free blacks in the North, Walker pointed to medical opinions to verify his prophesy about the ramifications of the abolitionist success. Alexander Duncan, a Democrat and doctor from Cincinnati, Walker explained, warned his congressional colleagues that "no man's fireside, person, family, or property would be safe by day or night." The result of emancipation, Walker quoting Duncan as saying, "would be to inundate the North with free blacks, with "paupers, beggars, thieves, assassins, and desperadoes, nearly all penniless and destitute, without skill, means, industry, or perseverance to obtain livelihood."⁶⁸ By stating that blacks had a tendency towards violence, especially when granted their freedom, Walker hoped to show how the threat of insurrection transcended sectionalism. Just as proslavery northerners explained the North's connection to protecting slavery by referencing their own sons going south to put down insurrections during the fear over the Haitian Revolution, the Mississippi senator used examples of northern proslavery opinion to show whites in the free states that they could not shelter their own lives from the outcome of ending slavery.

In order to gain the trust of northerners who read his pamphlet, Walker made assurances for a future where northerners would never have to worry about coming into contact with slavery and would rarely share public space with blacks. By expanding slavery to the Southwest, slaves, and even the U.S. black population as a whole, would

⁶⁷ *Letter of Mr. Walker, of Mississippi, Relative to the Annexation of Texas*, 13.

⁶⁸ *Letter of Mr. Walker, of Mississippi, Relative to the Annexation of Texas*, 13; *Congressional Globe*, 28 Cong., 1 sess., 108-110.

move away from the North. He asserted, "Much if not all of this great evil, will be prevented by the reannexation of Texas. Since the purchase of Louisiana and Florida, and the settlement of Alabama and Mississippi, there have been carried into this region, as the census demonstrates, from the States of Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and Kentucky, half a million of slaves, including their descendants, that otherwise would now be within the limits of those four States." He added that annexing Texas to the Union "must recede to the *same extent* from the northern of the slaveholding States, from the expulsion into them of free blacks, by abolition, gradual or immediate, would thereby be greatly mitigated, if not entirely prevented." If northerners wanted nothing to do with slavery, then adding Texas as a slave state, over thousand miles away from most northern cities, provided the best solution.⁶⁹

Walker ended his letter with a promise. He pledged, "The African being from a tropical climate, and from the region of the burning sands and sun, his comfort and condition would be greatly improved, by a transfer from northern latitude to the genial and most salubrious climate of Texas. There he would never suffer from the exposure to cold and frost, which he feels so much more severely than any other race." The outcome of adding another state to the Southwest was clear: "There is but one way in which the North can escape these evils; and that is the reannexation of Texas, which is the only safety-valve for the whole Union, and the only practicable outlet for the African population, through Texas, into Mexico and Central and Southern America."⁷⁰ Though Texas served as a safety valve against insurrections for southern slaveholders by working

⁶⁹ *Letter of Mr. Walker, of Mississippi, Relative to the Annexation of Texas*, 13.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

as a buffer against abolition, it also acted as a funnel for removing blacks from the United States, eventually forcing them to migrate to Mexico, Walker told his northern readers. If northerners who opposed slavery due to their dislike of black people would join him in supporting his cause, they would soon find the black population dwindling in the United States, making America an even whiter republic. Texas annexation was here characterized as colonization without the cost. Those in the North would not soon forget this assurance from Senator Walker when Texas eventually joined the Union and sharpened tensions between America and Mexico.

Walker's promise soon became a favored talking point for Democratic politicians who favored annexation. James Buchanan epitomized this tactic, restating his colleague from Mississippi's claims repeatedly in Congress. Buchanan stated that "Spaniards, Indians, and negroes, blended together in every variety...would receive our slaves on terms of perfect social equality." He continued that the Rio Grande seemed the natural boundary "between the Anglo-Saxon and Mexican races," between white and non-whites who naturally felt antipathy toward one another. "Providence," after all, the future president stated, "generally produces great changes by gradual means....May not, then, this acquisition of Texas be the means of gradually drawing slaves far to the South, to a climate more congenial to their nature; and may they not finally pass off into Mexico, and there mingle with a race where no prejudice exists against their color?"⁷¹ In trying to persuade other northerners to join him, Buchanan laid out the southern boundary of Manifest Destiny at Texas. Those skeptical of his claims would remember that line in the

⁷¹ *Congressional Globe* 28 Cong., 1st sess, 722.

future as well.

The annexationists, following Walker's promise, purposely overstated the impact on the black population when they maintained it would just eventually fade away in what would become the Lone Star State, thus taking away the taint of sectionalism from the process of annexation. The belief that the northern black population would diminish with the addition of Texas helped the annexation movement in the North withstand Secretary of State John C. Calhoun's attempts to sectionalize the acquisition of Texas. In a series of letters to the British minister to the United States in April 1844, Calhoun, having replaced Abel Upshur as secretary of state, wrote that the "Federal Government" had the "imperious duty" to add Texas to the Union as a way to protect the South from British abolitionism. The South Carolinian hoped to force abolitionists into accepting the premise that the federal government had the obligation to protect slavery in the South.⁷²

Although Calhoun's actions angered those who already supported the antislavery movement, Walker's connection between abolitionism and immigration certainly helped retain enough support for the annexation movement. Newspaper subscribers throughout New England read the argument in favor of Calhoun's letter and claimed that Calhoun was only standing up to British meddlers. After all, the article contended, blacks enslaved in the South were better off than free blacks in the North, according to the census. Because people then, as today, typically trusted figures produced by their government to be unbiased, whites with racist pretensions relied on what the government told them to be factual. Average citizens felt little reason to believe the government would purposely

⁷² John C. Calhoun to Richard Pakenham, April 18, 1844 in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, 18-25.

configure statistics to twist facts; and with little contact with blacks, they would have little grounds for challenging the census. Others in the Northeast read about the fear that planters had over the possibility of England gaining control of Texas. A newspaper editor from Connecticut told his readers, for example, "The sugar planters are friendly to a protective Tariff, but they view their future safety of vastly greater consequence than the temporary benefits of protection." One slaveholder asked the newspaper, "Do we care for temporary depreciation, when weighed against the *possibility* of permanent destruction?" Southerners should worry about their safety, the newspaper editor explained.⁷⁴ After Walker and other proslavery, pro-annexationists made national campaigns appealing to racial tension and national security, many in the North had no problem accepting Texas if it meant fewer blacks in the North and increased safety in the South.

Many southerners also supported the idea of the safety valve and the principle that Texas would serve as a buffer against abolitionists who wanted to cause a slave rebellion. Many living in the South came to accept the notion that Texas increased southern security when Andrew Jackson wrote a public letter, republished in numerous newspapers throughout the slave states, offering his embrace of the annexation of Texas. Old Hickory warned southerners about the possibility of chaos being introduced to the southern lifestyle by Great Britain and echoed Walker's idea that the Sabine River could be used to stir "the negroes to insurrection," causing "the lower country" to fall "and with it New Orleans" while "a servile war rages through the whole South and West." By adding Texas, the South's border would be moved to the Rio Grande, the former president

⁷⁴ New Hampshire *Gazette*, July 9th, July 11, 1844; Bridgeport, Ct, *Republican Farmer*, July 7, 1844. The 1840 census became a point of contention in Congress during the debate over Texas annexation. See Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 27-39.

stated, “which is itself a fortification, on account of its extensive, barren, and uninhabitable plains.” With Texas, the old general concluded, the United State would have “such a barrier on our west” that it would be “invincible.”⁷⁵

During the political season of 1844, Walker's thesis served as a way for opponents to attack Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren, the two anticipated nominees in the presidential election. Both men originally opposed annexation before changing their minds due to political expediency. Henry Clay, who was nominated by the Whigs, took the most damage from Texas annexation. One "letter by a New York gentleman in Louisiana," published in the Connecticut *Republican Farmer*, showed how much traction annexation had gained among voters, both North and South. He wrote, "The last time I traveled on the Western waters was May, 1840. Then, everybody, almost, seemed in favor of Harrison; now, almost all seem in favor of the Democratic nominees. I have met numbers of well informed persons on my route, from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana."⁷⁶ Democrats, however, gained momentum in 1844 by simply choosing to dump Van Buren and go with an ardent proponent of expansion, James K. Polk who, after Robert Walker changed the rules at the Democratic convention, won the nomination and eventually the presidency on a platform of territorial expansion.

⁷⁵ Charleston *Southern Patriot*, March 25, 1844; New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, March 29, 1844. Support for Texas in the South, however, was not close to unanimous. For instance, The Macon *Weekly Telegraph* published an article championing Henry Clay because they believed that the debt from the Texas Revolution, which the United States would eventually assume, would cause division within the Union, leaving the slave states unprotected. See Macon *Daily Telegraph*, July 23, 1844. The southern acceptance of the safety valve thesis became apparent during discussion regarding the Mexican cession, which will be discussed in chapter six.

⁷⁶ Bridgeport, Ct. *Republican Farmer*, July 7th, 1844.

The Texas issue did not create sectional fissures within the Democratic Party between antislavery northerners who supported Van Buren and opposed the extension of slavery in the West. Rather, the issue papered over cracks in the rank-and-file foundation caused by the economy—such as banking, the tariff, and improvements. Democrats who realized that the party was being held together by loose affiliations saw annexation as a powerful issue, just as Tyler had, and chose to run with it. Many within the Democracy believed that Texas offered a way for their party to separate itself from Whig opponents in the election of 1844 and thereby unify their own party, which many believed faced losses in the upcoming election.⁷⁷

Whereas Tyler and his supporters hoped to create a new party by supporting annexation, Democratic power brokers saw the issue as a way to renew their party, which had lost power for the first time in decades. Expansionists saw Texas annexation as fulfilling the Democratic ideology of economic independence. The fear of overpopulation abounded among many northeastern Democrats who worried that crowded cities would lower wages for the working class. They argued that cheap land in the West offered city workers, who currently depended on employment from others in order to stay alive and prosper, the opportunity to secure a farm in Texas and work for themselves. Proponents therefore contended that Democratic principles reverberated throughout the annexationist argument, and they believed that instead of being driven by sectional, slave power interests, party and national ideology defined the argument more. Tyler had succeeded in creating an electoral base out of the issue of Texas. However, when Democrats embraced

⁷⁷ Michael Morrison, "Martin Van Buren, the Democracy, and the Partisan Politics of Texas Annexation," *Journal of Southern History* 61 (November 1995): 697-707; Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997): 19-33.

expansion without nominating Tyler as their standard bearer, the president removed himself from seeking reelection.⁷⁸

Walker's message connecting antislavery views with England resonated with many in America, and Democrats used his thesis to gain votes. Just as Federalists tried to tie their opponents to the French after the Haitian Revolution, Democrats in 1844 did their best to connect the Whigs, and the antislavery movement, to the British. Furthermore, Texas helped to sustain the middle ground between antislavery and proslavery radicalism. Several Democrats criticized both radical antislavery and proslavery positions on Texas and rejected calls by southern radicals who threatened secession over Texas. Annexation allowed many southerners to argue that slavery was best protected within the Union, thus undermining those in the planter class who had begun to criticize the American system of government.⁷⁹

In the end, Texas would join the Union under a cloud of controversy. As the antislavery movement filibustered the final treaty between the United States and the Republic of Texas that made it the twenty-eighth state, Tyler and those in favor of annexation needed to find a way around the Constitution. They did so by passing a joint resolution in the House and Senate that only needed a majority vote, unlike treaties, which require a two-thirds vote in the Senate. Both the *Washington Globe* and *New York Evening Post*, along with other less prominent newspapers, supported the joint resolution to annex Texas and worked to squeeze out the final votes for passage by slim margins. They, along with much of the nation, believed that adding Texas to the United States

⁷⁸ Morrison, "Martin Van Buren, the Democracy, and the Partisan Politics of Texas Annexation," 712-715.

⁷⁹ Varon, *Disunion!*, 171; Eric H. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992): 132-136.

represented the providential march of Americans towards the Pacific. Furthermore, having no distaste for the expansion of slavery westward, many Democrats in the North supported the congressional resolution that acted as an endrun around the Constitution because several believed Robert Walker when he wrote that the addition of Texas might indeed end slavery in the long run.⁸⁰ During the final days of his term, John Tyler, at long last, signed the bill that formally invited Texas to become the twenty-eighth state, which they would accept a few months later.

Those in the North, however, would not forget the promise Walker and his supporters made about funneling slavery through Texas to South America. Nor would southerners who embraced the need for a safety valve for slavery accept that Texas would be enough to protect the slave South from future black population growth leading to an insurrection. As tensions grew with Mexico, the United States elected a new president, James K. Polk, who successfully campaigned explicitly on national expansion and manifest destiny. Americans soon found themselves in a controversial war in which victory resulted in hundreds of thousands square miles being added to the United States. It would be over determining the future of that new land that Walker's promise came into direct conflict with the expectations held by southerners in the slave South who believed the federal government had the duty to keep their states secure against a servile insurrection.

⁸⁰ Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 157-159.

Chapter Six

Wilmot's Proviso and the Slaveholding Crisis

If you confine the slaves to the cotton States within their present limits, you will compel the white population of that region either to abandon it to the black, or to endure the debasing consequences of an admixture of races. Thus they have to decide a question both of existence and civilization, as well as of liberty.

-John Holcombe's Secessionist Speech, Virginia, March 20, 1861¹

The clouds opened and the sky boomed with thunder on March 4, 1845, as Chief Justice Roger Taney stood, Bible in hand, to swear in the next president of the United States. The temperature had fallen to the forties, and the jurist and the president-elect stood against the cold. Behind them rested the white columns of the United States Capitol's East Portico, where the president-elect's star had risen during his tenure as Speaker of the House. The marble columns sharply contrasted with the ocean of umbrellas flowing before them, where thousands of American citizens stood in inches of mud to hear their new president's first national address. Few had expected him to win the nomination of his party, even less thought he could gain victory over the nationally renowned Henry Clay, but James Knox Polk of Tennessee—nicknamed "Young Hickory" because he had been a protégé of Andrew Jackson—had beaten the odds, becoming the eleventh president of the United States of America.²

¹ *Showdown in Virginia: The 1861 Convention and the Fate of the Union*, eds. William W. Freehling and Craig M. Simpson (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010): 69.

² Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, *President James Knox Polk, 1845* <http://inaugural.senate.gov/history/chronology/jkpolk1845.cfm>.

During the campaign for the presidency in 1844, Polk had followed a set of positions laid out by Robert Walker, the man who had helped push through Congress the annexation of Texas. Walker had played an influential role in helping the former Speaker of the House obtain the nomination at the Democratic National Convention when he pressed a rule change that made it nearly impossible for the former president, Martin Van Buren, to receive enough votes for the nomination. A member of the pro-annexationist camp, Polk took the idea of expansion further than even President Tyler had dreamed when he declared that he stood not for the annexation of Texas alone but of Oregon as well. Riding the popular sentiment of expansion welling up in some parts of the United States, especially in the South, while effectively using smear tactics on his opponents, "Young Hickory" became the heir of Jackson following his former mentor as president of the United States by the narrowest of margins, winning New York by only five thousand votes when the abolitionist Liberty Party stripped the Whigs of nearly ten thousand votes, tilting the state's electors to the Democrats.³

Telegraph operators tapped descriptions of the scene. A man reputed to be one of the best stump speakers in the nation by friends and foes alike, Polk delivered his inaugural address to his fellow citizens, expressing his vision for the future of the United States on that cold March day. At the age of forty-nine, James K. Polk became the first person in his forties to become president of the United States. Understanding his

³ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005): 566-575; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 682-690; Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 201-206; William Dusinger, *Slavemaster President: The Double Career of James Polk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 119-140; Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000): 144-145.

youthfulness might make some Americans uneasy, the new president assured the nation that he understood what so many Americans saw as the “exceptional” nature of the Union. Calling it the "most admirable and wisest system of well-regulated self-government among men, ever devised by human minds," the new president told the audience, "Every lover of his country must shudder at the thought of the possibility of its dissolution."⁴ He pledged to protect the uniqueness of the American Union that so many of his citizens believed made their nation special among the rest of the world.

A steadfast member of the proslavery movement and a large slaveholder himself, the president told the crowd that he hoped to unify the country by challenging abolitionism, which he held responsible for causing a rift between the free and slave states. Polk viewed the antislavery movement as the greatest threat to the Union that so many American citizens loved. He continued, "It is a source of deep regret that in some sections of our country, misguided persons have occasionally indulged in schemes and agitations, whose object is the destruction of domestic institutions existing in other sections." Polk said that Americans would never allow the Union to crumble over slavery. "I am happy to believe that at every period of our existence as a nation, there has existed, and continues to exist, among the great mass of our people, a devotion to the Union of the States, which will shield and protect it against the moral treason of any who would seriously contemplate its destruction." He told northerners, however, that the South would not receive any special interests either. Instead, Americans, he wrote, shared a "common destiny." All "peculiar interests of sections or classes, must operate to the

⁴ Thomas Hart Benton, *Abridgement of the Debates of Congress from 1789 to 1856: Dec. 4, 1843-June 18, 1846*, vol. XV (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1861): 237-238.

prejudice of the interests of their fellow-citizens, and should be avoided."⁵ The nation would move forward together, he promised.

Like Walker, whom Polk appointed Secretary of the Treasury, the new president believed that acquiring more land in the West would serve as the best way to unite the country behind the goals of security and national greatness. Texas was important to the Union, Polk stated, because "the safety of New Orleans and of our whole south-western frontier against hostile aggression, as well as the interests of the whole Union, would be promoted by it." However, to show his devotion to the country as a whole, he also focused on the "re-occupation" of the American Northwest, contending: "Our title to the country of Oregon is clear and unobjectionable."⁶ Americans, he hoped, would rally behind expansion if they believed the nation—altogether—would benefit from it, regardless of where they lived.

President Polk's stance regarding the American-British dispute over Oregon Territory fulfilled the Democratic platform of 1844. His posture that the claim for Oregon by the United States was "clear and unobjectionable" came directly from his party's position on western lands. In Baltimore the Democratic National Convention had resolved "the re-occupation of Oregon and the re-annexation of Texas at the earliest practicable period are great American measures which this Convention recommends." In the months that followed Polk's inauguration, a wing of the Democratic Party that demanded "all Oregon" soon created a slogan: "Fifty-four Forty or Fight!" The catchphrase referred to the extreme north latitude of Oregon Territory, which today is the

⁵ Ibid., 239.

⁶ Ibid., 239-240.

southern border of Alaska. Gaining control of this land would block England from having a Pacific port, thus weakening what most saw as America's biggest military rival in North America. These expansionists willingly risked a clash with England for more territory. However, the fight for additional lands would not materialize in the rainy forests of the Northwest, and the Polk administration negotiated a settlement that only gave one-half of the territory to the U.S, granting the United States what would eventually become Oregon and Washington. Instead, the "fight" that so many expansionists anticipated occurred nearly two thousand miles away from 54° 40 north latitude.⁷ Just as the anti-annexationists had predicted, the United States found itself embroiled in a tense standoff with its southern neighbor on the border of Texas less than a year after James K. Polk's inauguration.

The annexation of Texas by the United States enraged many in Mexico City. Mexican newspapers called for war as the only method that could save their nation. Despite wanting to avoid conflict, the Mexican President José Joaquín de Herrera called for states to fill their quotas for troops and told his diplomats in France and England to explain that his nation had no choice but to fight the United States. To make matters worse, Polk demanded the border of Texas be pushed southward to the Rio Grande—not the Nueces River, as Mexico claimed—and in response authorized nearly 8,000 troops, led by General Zachary Taylor, to be garrisoned on the American determination of the Texas border. He hoped to intimidate the Mexican president into selling the United States

⁷ Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, eds, *National Party Platforms, 1840-1964* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966): 3-4; Frederick Merk, *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967): 364-417; Edwin A. Miles, " 'Fifty-four Forty or Fight'—An American Political Legend," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44 (Sept., 1957): 291-309.

the northern half of his country—modern-day sections of New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and California. The new president was willing to offer Mexico \$40 million for the territory, believing, condescendingly, that Mexicans would gladly sell a huge portion of their nation to the United States. For years, members of the proslavery movement had wanted American control of California in order to weaken British strength in North America. Mexican officials unsurprisingly declined the offer by the Americans.⁸

American and Mexican troops squared off on the border for months. Finally, in April 1846, the tension turned into conflict when Zachary Taylor received intelligence of a Mexican corps crossing the border and in response sent a reconnaissance team, led by Captain Seth Thornton, to scout the area. As Captain Thornton wandered twenty miles away from camp with seventy soldiers under his lead, he stumbled into an ambush set by the Mexican army. After a small battle, eleven Americans were killed, and six wounded. The rest had been captured in a resounding victory, inspiring a thrill that spread throughout Mexico. The Mexican general in charge of the battle proclaimed his pleasure at having started a war with the United States. However, on the American side of the battle, a little-known lieutenant in Taylor's army, Ulysses S. Grant, analyzed it in a different way. Writing after the fact, Grant wrote, "We were sent to provoke a fight, but it was essential that Mexico should commence it. It was very doubtful whether Congress would declare war; but if Mexico should attack our troops, the Executive could announce" that war with Mexico had already begun. Few would stand in the way of a war

⁸ David A. Clary, *Eagles and Empire: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle For A Continent* (New York: Bantam Books, 2009): 62-103; Hietala, *Manifest Destiny: American Exceptionalism and Empire, Revised Edition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985): 153-156; Robert W. Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs: James K Polk, The Mexican War, and the Conquest of the American Continent* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009): 194-195. See also John C. Pinheiro, *Manifest Ambition: James K. Polk and the Civil-Military Relations during the Mexican War* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007).

defensively protecting the nation, as the administration knew. President Polk had received his wish. Two weeks after hearing the news from Texas, he urged Congress to declare war against Mexico and called for volunteers to be raised and a "liberal provision...made for sustaining our entire military force and furnishing it with supplies and munitions of war."⁹ The president prepared to unleash the dogs of war.

Congress immediately took up the measure proposed by Polk, and the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives passed quickly the declaration of war. Only seventeen members dissented. The Senate, however, hesitated to involve the United States in a military conflict, and both Whigs and some Democrats wanted time to debate the issue. One of those Democrats was John C. Calhoun who, despite having been so staunchly in favor of Texas annexation, hoped to slow down the nation's march towards war with its neighbor. The South Carolinian believed there should be a difference between "hostilities" and "war" with Mexico, noting that one was a short term brush-up, and the other a long-term military confrontation. Just days before the vote, Calhoun wrote to an acquaintance that "I deplore [fighting against Mexico] every way." He worried "that it may arrest, or even defeat the settlement of the Oregon Question, [and] introduce the interference of both England [and] France before it is concluded." Hostilities with Mexico, he feared, opened the possibility of a larger military contest between the Abolitionist Power in England and the United States. However, despite Calhoun's best attempts at slowing down the process, the senate consented to a declaration of war against Mexico with a vote of 40 to 2, with three senators, including Calhoun, refusing to

⁹ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant, Two Volumes In One* (Old Saybrook, Ct: Konecky and Konecky, 1999): 45; Robert W. Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs*, 238-245; *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, Volume III* (1877): 2287-2293; Clary, *Eagles and Empire*, 95-99.

vote. For the first time in the nation's history, the United States prepared to fight a war exclusively on foreign soil.¹⁰

Only a few months after the initial declaration of war, the president, believing the conflict would be ended quickly, asked Congress for two million dollars in order to negotiate lands away from the Republic of Mexico. The American military action against their neighbor now created the possibility for Polk, and many other expansionists, to seize upon their dreams of creating a continental American republic. The United States would stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific, more than quadrupling its size in seventy years. Proceeding with the Mexican War opened a political divide between Whigs and Democrats over the topic of westward expansion. Whigs took the same stance they had during the debate over Texas annexation—no more land meant no more sectional strife. The Democrats, however, held the majority in both chambers of Congress and had the advantage of riding the wave of popular enthusiasm for their measures in the election of 1844, which promised more land to the white working class in the North and the yeomen in the South. Confident that they could continue to make westward expansion a national issue by following Robert Walker's template for promoting the acquisition of more land, Democratic leaders believed the call for money to pay for Mexican land seemed an easy task for Congress to perform. They would be surprised at the weakness of their national coalition.¹¹

¹⁰ John C. Calhoun to Thomas Clemson, May 12, 1846 in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, 95-96; *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 783-787; Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs*, 245-252.

¹¹ The best discussion of what happened in Congress during the initial introduction of Wilmot's Proviso still remains David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, ed. Don. E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976): 18-24, 64-75. See also Chaplain W. Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967) for

Not wanting to take up too much time on such a mundane task, leaders in the House of Representatives limited the debate about the president's appropriation bill to only a couple of hours. Two Whigs expectedly attacked President Polk's expansionist plan and challenged his need for an appropriation of two million dollars. Robert Winthrop of Massachusetts expressed concerns about "a bill to place two millions of dollars at the disposal of the President 'for any extraordinary emergencies which might arise out of intercourse with foreign nations'" without "a word about peace" or Mexico. He worried about the possibility of perpetual wars of conquest. Two Democrats came in support of the measure to grant the president an appropriation that they insisted could end the war and promote peaceful relations between Mexico and the United States.¹²

Next, the Speaker of the House, John W. Davis from Indiana, recognized a freshman congressman from Pennsylvania with a record of loyalty to the White House. Davis assumed that Polk's plan risked nothing from hearing him speak. The error of that assumption would resound throughout the rest of American history. In the ten minutes allotted to him, David Wilmot first told Congress that unlike his Whig colleagues, "he believed [the war with Mexico] a necessary and proper war." He insisted that congressmen who said it was a war for conquest were mistaken. Wilmot stated that he "trusted it was not to be a war of conquest." He trusted that the president was "sincerely ready to negotiate for an honorable peace." The congressman who voted with the

an examination of how the Wilmot Proviso affected the Democratic caucus in Congress and the party as a whole.

¹² *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong. 1 sess., 1211-1213.

president on every issue—from the Oregon border to the tariff—appeared to be defending Polk once again from his harsh critics.¹³

After expressing his confidence in the president's war effort, however, Wilmot dropped a bombshell that altered the course of American politics and helped lead to the Civil War. He explained that while he did not disagree with adding more land to the United States, "he was most earnestly desirous that a portion of territory on the Pacific...should come into our possession by fair and honorable means." His opposition would stem from only one objection. As the congressman explained, "whatever territory might be acquired, he declared himself opposed, now and forever, to the extension of this 'peculiar institution' that belongs to the South." He had voted in favor of Texas annexation because "slavery had already been established there," he said. "But, if free territory comes in," such as land from Mexico that had not seen legal slavery in decades, "God forbid that he should be the means of planting this institution upon it."¹⁴ Uneasiness loomed over the House of Representatives as southerners prepared to refute the Pennsylvanian's charges. Members watching could only anticipate what would happen next.

David Wilmot soon found the opportunity to turn his words into actions, proposing an amendment to the president's appropriation bill that would change the political debate regarding expansion for years to come. Modeled after the familiar language Thomas Jefferson used in authoring the Northwest Ordinance, the Democratic

¹³ *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong. 1 sess., 1214; Charles Buxton Going, *David Wilmot: Free-Soiler* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1924): 47-93.

¹⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong. 1 sess., 1214.

newcomer proposed “as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico by the United States...neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted.”¹⁵ This proposal forever after became known as the Wilmot Proviso.¹⁶ In reaction, southern slaveholders argued the stability of their slave labor system could not be maintained and protected by the federal government as the rising population of the North gave more power to the free states and the antislavery movement. President Polk's hopes of national unity in marching the nation towards the Pacific began to unwind.

News of the Wilmot Proviso spread quickly throughout Washington. Panicked agents of the administration rushed to Capitol Hill, hoping to lobby faithful Democrats to kill the amendment. Soon, urgency grew great enough to bring three cabinet members in order to the House to twist the arms of party members. They desperately tried to keep their coalition together. Many of those in attendance watching the drama play out on the House floor feared that the political Pandora's box of slavery had been opened as

¹⁵ Ibid., 1217; Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone To Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 110-111.

¹⁶ The most common explanation for Wilmot's motivation to cause such a stir over the acquisition of Mexican territory is that Van Burenites, of which Wilmot was one, wanted to restore a sectional balance against what they saw as a southern domination of their party following the nomination of Polk and his appointment of southerners to powerful cabinet positions along with what was felt as a betrayal by the new slaveholding president's abandoning of the principle of acquiring all of Oregon from the British. Furthermore, Wilmot had been upset by a Polk veto of a rivers and harbor bill that affected his district. See Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism*, 3-20. Wilmot, as will be explained, however, explained his actions by pointing to Robert Walker's promise made during the Texas annexation issue. Eric Foner claims that Wilmot acted not in aggression against the South, but instead offered his proviso as a way to buttress northern Democrats against the growing antislavery movement in the free states, see Eric Foner, "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited," *The Journal of American History* 56, 2 (Sept. 1969) 262-279.

Democratic leadership acted desperately to keep it closed. However, debate was still limited. Voting on the appropriation bill started within two hours of Wilmot's proposal as had been scheduled. In a last-ditch effort to save the bill's passage from causing momentous sectional strife, a Democrat from Indiana offered his own addendum to the bill, replacing the proviso with an extension of the Missouri Compromise line of 36° 30' all the way to the Pacific. The compromise measure was voted down 89 to 54. Next, Wilmot's amendment to prohibit slavery in the West passed by a vote of 80 to 64. Of all the votes against the Wilmot Proviso, only three came from congressmen outside of the South. The proslavery movement in the House of Representatives frantically sought a way to stop the prohibition of slavery in the lands acquired from Mexico while Democratic leadership tried to keep their national coalition together, attempting to table the measure after it became apparent that Wilmot's Proviso would stay in the bill. They failed.¹⁷

The roll call produced a stark divide, not between the usual suspects—Whigs and Democrats—but rather, between the politicians from free and slave states. Northerners opposed postponing consideration of the bill, while southerners tried to prevent a vote on the appropriation from going to the floor. Representatives from the South, hoping a delay would allow cooler heads to prevail, floundered in their attempt to table Polk's request for negotiation money. The bill, Wilmot's amendment included, came to a vote. The legislation passed, 85 to 80, with the division for and against being almost completely sectional. The House then sent the bill to the Senate. A simple request for an

¹⁷ Ibid., 1217-1221; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 21-23; Going, *David Wilmot*, 94-105.

appropriation opened a small crack in the national two-party political system of the United States. Antislavery politicians soon sought a way to pass Wilmot's amendment in the Senate.¹⁸

Democratic unity over sectional issues had been decaying for years, as northern representatives grew tired of forestalling their own initiatives in favor of southern demands to protect slavery. This was especially true for the New York contingent of Van Burenites known as the Bucktails who believed that southerners had become too powerful a force in their party. The fissure became apparent in 1844 when John Quincy Adams finally found a sufficient coalition of Congressmen, including fifty-four Democrats, to repeal the gag rule. Southern power over the Democratic Party generally, and the House of Representatives specifically, had declined, allowing something like the Wilmot Proviso, inconceivable just a few years before, to actually pass the lower chamber of Congress. The appropriation bill served as the perfect vehicle for Wilmot's amendment to prohibit the further extension of slavery westward, as it was both desperately wanted by President Polk and presented to the Congress with a sense of urgency.¹⁹

Because the following day was a Sunday, the Senate did not take up the Wilmot Proviso until two days later, the last day of the congressional session. Senator John Davis, a Massachusetts Whig friendly to the bill, tried to speak until it would be too late

¹⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 1217.

¹⁹ Michael F. Holt, "The Slavery Issue," in Ed. Julian E. Zelizer, *The American Congress: The Building of Democracy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004): 191 William Lee Miller, *Arguing Over Slavery*, 476-487; Richards, *The Slave Power*, 145-146.

to send the bill back to the House for revision without the proviso's prohibition of slavery in the West. However, because of a miscalculation—the clock in the House was faster than the one in the Senate—Davis spoke too long. With eight minutes left in the Senate session, Davis was informed that the House had already adjourned. Thus, the first session of the Twenty-ninth Congress expired. Those in favor of keeping slavery out of national politics had apparently dodged the issue once again. For the first time in history, a controversial bill had been talked to death in the United States Senate, albeit by accident.²⁰

After such an anticlimactic resolution to the Wilmot Proviso crisis, public reaction remained quite muted. This, as well as the break between sessions, convinced the administration that it could lean on enough rogue Democrats to convince them to change their vote and thus prevent any further sectional clashing. Polk had written in his diary that the Wilmot Proviso was a "mischievous [and] foolish amendment," and wondered, "what connection slavery had with making peace with Mexico it is difficult to conceive."²¹ These presidential pretensions soon would mean very little as the beginning of second session of the Twenty-ninth Congress approached.

President Polk did, indeed, talk to Wilmot during the congressional recess for Christmas at the end of December 1846. In their meeting, the president told Wilmot, "I did not desire to extend slavery, that I would be satisfied to acquire by Treaty from Mexico the Provinces of New Mexico and the Californias, and that in these Provinces

²⁰ Ibid., 1220; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 22; Going, *David Wilmot*, 101-102.

²¹ Milo Milton Quaife, ed., *The Diary of James K. Polk: During His Presidency, 1845 to 1849, volume II* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1910): 75.

slavery could probably never exist." The slaveholding president held to the conviction that slavery would never take root in West. Wilmot promised the president that he would not re-introduce a bill to restrict slavery in land acquired from Mexico, but that "if it was moved by others he would feel constrained to vote for it."²²

Just a few weeks later, Wilmot was forced to keep his word. Preston King, another northern Democrat closely connected to Van Buren, reintroduced Wilmot's proviso—this time adding it to a bill asking for three million dollars of negotiation money. Possibly stemming from a taunt launched by northern Whigs that Democrats would never accept adding free territory to the nation due to their devotion to the South, Preston's version of the proviso took things a step further. Instead of prohibiting slavery from any of the lands acquired from Mexico only, his version stated that slavery would be banned from "any territory which shall hereafter be acquired by or be annexed to the United States." After years of working to keep the issue of slavery out of politics, politicians faced a new, intense sectional controversy in the form of an appropriations bill that paid for lands not yet conquered from a war not yet won. Again, the votes split according to section, with many northern Democrats joining Whigs in attacking the expansion of slavery. Wilmot's supporters became ever more determined to keep black slaves out of the West, while antislavery Whigs took the opportunity to strike against the institution they found to be immoral. Two groups, with two different reasons to oppose

²² Ibid., 288-289, 299.

slavery, formed an unlikely bipartisan coalition to prevent slavery from entering any more American territory.²³

In their initial attack against the Wilmot Proviso, proslavery southerners connected patriotism and national pride in the success of the military campaign against Mexico to the defense of American exceptionalism. After the short war, southerners argued they earned the right to bring their slaves into the Mexican Cession because of their disproportionate participation in the war against Mexico. The percentage of southerners in the officer corps was higher than the South's proportion of the nation's population because the three-fifths compromise gave the slaveholding region more places at West Point—most appointments came in the form of congressional appointments to the military academy. For many slaveholders opposed to the Wilmot Proviso, the fact that southerners risked their lives to gain territory in the West made any restriction of slavery a slight not just against civilian slaveholders but also to those from the South who fought valiantly for the military during the war against Mexico, many southerners argued.²⁴

Congressman Franklin Welsh Bowdon of Alabama took up opposition to Wilmot in the name of southern veterans of the war against Mexico. He declared to the House of Representatives, "In the prosecution of the war in which we are now engaged, the South

²³ *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 105; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 64-65; Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism*, 30-32; Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 250-255; Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power*, 150-154; Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1970): 23-33. Hannibal Hamlin who would eventually serve as Abraham Lincoln's first vice president also became heavily involved in trying to implement a law that forbade slavery from all territory acquired by the United States.

²⁴ William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992): 154-156.

has willingly tendered her treasure and the blood of her noblest sons. Now, as heretofore, she gloriously rallies around the national flag, rejoices in its triumphs, and mourns its disasters. When the contest is over, and victory won, she will demand, not the badge of degradation, but an equal participation in the fruits of a joint struggle.”²⁵ Slaveholders had fought for western lands too, the Alabaman insisted. Excluding slavery from any newly acquired land effectively punished southerners for risking their lives in battle.

Unlike reactions to the Haitian Revolution, the abolitionist postal campaign, or the fears caused by Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner, white southerners’ proximity to free territory did not cause a split in the southern vote over the Wilmot Proviso. People in the southwestern slave states joined the older slave states in the East in protest against the restriction of slavery from lands acquired from the Mexican war. For example, according to newspaper reports, a large population in the newly added state of Texas opposed the proviso. The editors of *Houston Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register* stated, “We know of no person in the State who has expressed a willingness to sustain this Proviso: but on the contrary, we have found that it is so universally condemned here, that we considered it unnecessary to hazard a remark against it.”²⁶ Though Polk prepared to veto any measure containing a restriction against slavery in the West, the proslavery movement feared the Wilmot Proviso’s steadily growing support and consolidated into one voice of opposition. Whereas northern doughfaces or southern moderates such as Henry Clay tried to smooth over sectional tension with compromise throughout the 1830s, the Wilmot Proviso—in both the North and the South—became a yes or no

²⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 1847, 140.

²⁶ *Houston Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register*, April 13, 1848.

proposition for Congress, something upon which middle ground would be difficult to find.²⁷

Some proslavery citizens decided to take their complaints directly to the seat of the federal government in Washington. *The Daily Picayune* of New Orleans reported, “Efforts are making to obtain a subscription with a view to establish a Washington paper which 'shall reflect the public sentiment of the South on the abolition and Wilmot proviso question.’ ”²⁸ Far from just seeing the proviso as an affront to their sensibilities, as historians have suggested, southerners viewed Wilmot's actions and success as evidence that the Abolitionist Power had gained strength within the federal government. One congressman even called the Wilmot Proviso an act of war against the South. Despite the fact that southerners talked of disunion, they tried to show their loyalty to the United States and painted the potential sectional rift as the consequence of antislavery movement aggression towards the South, something that could be dealt with while remaining within the fold of the Union.

When the House of Representatives again voted to ban slavery from the West, the proslavery movement felt compelled to react against a possible future that hemmed the South in with free soil. It soon became clear that, unlike the abolitionist postal campaign, the Wilmot Proviso had gained a surprising amount of traction in the North. When free-state Democrats voted in favor of the amendment, it proved to southerners that

²⁷ Dusiinberre, *Slavemaster President*, 144.

²⁸ New Orleans *The Times Picayune*, August 26, 1847; *The Wilmot Proviso speech of Hon. J.C. Dobbin, of N. Carolina, delivered in the House of Representatives, February 11, 1847, on the Wilmot Proviso prohibiting slavery in any territories whatever that may hereafter be acquired by the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Blair and Rives, 1847): 1.

northerners were less willing to protect slavery than ever before. As an attempt to regain support for slavery in the free states, many southern members of Congress harkened back to the Constitutional Convention and stressed the exceptional nature of the nation's founding in hopes of portraying to northerners an American tradition of compromise on the issue of slavery. David S. Kaufman from Texas, for example, talked about the give and take of the Founding Fathers as they negotiated the creation of the American federal system. The Texan said, "Our constitutional union...was based upon compromise, and by compromise alone can it be preserved. But when you depart from this principle; when you take the lion's share of the common stock, and appropriate it to one portion of the Union, and leave nothing for the other, you at once destroy that equality which is the basis of all lasting unions."²⁹ Following the lead set by his proslavery predecessors, the congressman implied that voting for the proviso was a direct attack against America's founding—against its exceptional nature and form of government. This was something Kaufman hoped northerners who held tightly to the idea of American exceptionalism and unionism would find appalling.

Southern newspapers flashed headlines across the South warning about the restrictions placed on slavery in the West and how they undermined the Constitution. The Richmond *Enquirer* splashed the words "THE WILMOT PROVISIO!" in the middle of its front page. The article warned that abolitionists had decided to destroy the national union. "The tocsin, 'the fire bell at night,' is now sounding in our ears; the madmen of the North and North West have, we fear, cast the die, and number the days of this glorious Union,"

²⁹ *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 1847, 149-154.

the newspaper declared.³⁰ The South was being assaulted, the *Enquirer* told its readers, by fanatics so blinded by their hatred for slavery that they risked tearing the nation apart.

Southern Democrats understood that they needed to act fast before many of the voters in their states turned against them and searched for a new vehicle to represent them in Congress. Despite considering emancipation just fifteen years earlier during the aftermath of Nat Turner, Virginia's reaction to the Wilmot Proviso was no different than South Carolina's. Besides reporting the news out of Washington that the House of Representatives had passed a prohibition of slavery in the lands acquired from Mexico, the *Enquirer* also detailed a meeting held by Democrats in the Old Dominion in which the politicians vowed to fight the Wilmot Proviso with all their power. The newspaper encouraged "all Virginians and Southern men" to "unite, heart and hand, in resisting, even unto death, the doctrines of [Wilmot's] proviso."³¹ Southerners from the upper slave states appeared ready to join those in the lower South in the fight against Wilmot's restrictions on slavery in the territories.

As Democrats from the slave states colluded, they appeared to be losing their former allies and replacing them with new ones. Two weeks after the *Enquirer* shared that Democrats had met to discuss how they should react, the Charleston *Southern Patriot* reported that southern members of both parties joined together, also in Richmond, to discuss how they would respond in a unified voice of opposition against the proviso. On

³⁰ Richmond *Enquirer*, February 19, 1847. After supporting James K. Polk for the nomination and presidency, Thomas Ritchie had moved away from the *Enquirer* in order to start a pro-administration newspaper, *The Union*, in Washington, D.C. where he supported the extension of the Missouri Compromise line all the way to the Pacific. See, Charles Henry Ambler, *Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics* (Richmond, VA: Bell Books and Stationary, 1913): 253-254, 273-275.

³¹ Ibid.

the floor of Congress, one Mississippian stated that with the passage of Wilmot Proviso the South had been “betrayed by our friends, and are to be robbed of our rights by those on whom we have reposed our confidence and trust.” Slaveholding leaders insisted that free-state congressmen had broken the sacred compact forged during the American Revolution when they voted against the extension of slavery in the territories. The Constitution, they insisted, prevented any kind of restrictions on slaveholding even if it gave Congress authority over the territories. One Virginian compared restricting slavery in the territories to limiting other well-known constitutional rights. He asked, “Can you abolish the trial by jury in the Territories, or in the District of Columbia?”³² To some proslavery members of Congress, America’s commitment to the Constitution, something that made the nation different than the rest of the world, appeared to be eroding.

The historian Michael Morrison has argued that the ideology of the American Revolution and its meaning for the United States played a crucial role in the development of the sectional crisis that swirled around the Wilmot Proviso. Antislavery northerners in favor of the restriction of slavery argued that the Founding Fathers had fought to protect liberty from intrusion of the Slave Power along with independence for white westerners. Proslavery southerners, on the other hand, believed the Revolution and Constitution crafted in 1787 represented the United States’ defense of minority rights under a constitutional government.³³

³² *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 112, 134; *Charleston Southern Patriot*, February 26, 1847.

³³ Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 1-13, 39-65. For a discussion of northern political attacks against what became known as the Slave Power see Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006): 130-157.

Revolutionary ideology from the 1770s, however, did not make up the core of the debate over the Wilmot Proviso. Instead, southerners worried specifically about the erosion of their distinct definition of American exceptionalism. During the 1830s, those in the proslavery movement had debated whether the founding and the Constitution had created a government that differed from the Parliament of England, which had ended slavery in the West Indies without the direct representation of Caribbean planters. Fearing a similar outcome for themselves, southerners argued with their antislavery counterparts that the federal government must not be malleable enough for one section of the country to lose its power, subjecting the American planter class to the same outcome Parliament inflicted on Caribbean slaveholders. For many, the federal government's protection of slavery had protected something already established and agreed upon at the Constitutional Convention. Antislavery political maneuvering in the West was a radical change that proslavery forces contended should require a large consensus in order to be enacted.³⁴

Slaveholding politicians believed the American Revolution and the Americans conception of their nation as exceptional, embodied by the Constitution, offered them a powerful ideological foundation to use against the antislavery movement. J.C. Dobbin, a North Carolina member of the House of Representatives, reminded northerners that those who attended the Constitutional Convention "compromised their personal opinions on the altar of patriotism."³⁵ The implication was clear: to restrict the ability of slaveholders in

³⁴ See chapter three of this dissertation.

³⁵ J. C. Dobbin, *The Wilmot Proviso Speech of Hon. J.C. Dobbin, Of North Carolina Delivered in the House of Representatives, February 11, 1847*, 3.

the South from bringing the enslaved to the West broke the solemn commitment offered to southerners during the struggle for American independence and the ratification of the Constitution. Essentially, it made the republic established by that document no different than any other form of democracy in the world, because its promises could be broken and its rules changed by a simple majority. He contended that both Georgia and South Carolina would never have joined the national confederation without the promise that slavery could never be legislated out of existence by the federal government. For the congressmen this included threatening slavery indirectly by not allowing it to be spread to other territories. Dobbin urged his northern compatriots to put their patriotism and faith in the Union ahead of their antislavery conviction. The proslavery movement once again hoped to unveil the antislavery movement's disloyalty to the United States.

Dobbin was not alone in this line of attack against the proviso. Proslavery forces hoped that portraying abolitionists as antithetical to the founding and the meaning of American exceptionalism would cause northern Democrats—whom they believed had simply been caught up in a temporary furor caused by the Wilmot Proviso—to feel uneasy with their new antislavery allies. George W. Towns, the governor of Georgia, stated in his inaugural address that the Wilmot Proviso was "an act repugnant to the Constitution, destructive of our rights, and dishonorable to George Washington as one of the parties to the Federal Compact."³⁶ Many local politicians reiterated the idea that threatening the rights of slaveholders assailed the father of the nation himself and eroded the agreement between free and slave states that so many believed to be the foundation of

³⁶ *The Southern Patriot*, November 9, 1847.

American uniqueness. Wilmot, many proslavery opponents proclaimed, worked to make the United States no different from the rest of the world.

The proslavery movement as a whole, not just politicians working in the confines of the Capitol or state legislatures, worked to characterize the Wilmot Proviso as an attack on the Constitution. One southern newspaper from South Carolina, the *Southern Patriot*, wrote, "The great founders of this country entered into a deliberate compact and understanding, as a fundamental condition of the Union, that in its *federal capacity*, the government should never, directly or indirectly, meddle with the question of internal slavery."³⁷ By expanding federal power to protect slavery during the 1830s, southerners had opened the pathway for Wilmot's proviso. In the 1840s, southerners had to reconcile their statements that the founders wanted the federal government to not "meddle with the question of internal slavery" with the strengthened power they had advocated in defense of slavery while they dominated the national government over the past few decades. They did so by claiming that the reasoning and precedents created in defense of slavery over the years included any "indirect attacks" on the southern institution, making any action by the federal government that could be deemed as antislavery fall under the proslavery definition of what was unconstitutional.³⁸

Many slaveholders did feel genuinely slighted by their northern colleagues in Congress who supported Wilmot's attempt to keep them out of all land taken from

³⁷ Ibid., November 18, 1847.

³⁸ The proslavery movement would make similar claims against ending the slave trade in the nation's capital, calling such a move by antislavery members of Congress unconstitutional despite the clear wording of the Constitution granting "exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever" in the District of Columbia. See Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 49-88.

Mexico. Howell Cobb, who within a few years would become Speaker of the House, felt outrage at the moral condemnation from northerners that he believed underpinned the Wilmot Proviso. He asked, "Where is the reason urged by the gentleman from Pennsylvania to show that the North, or that portion of the North who sympathize with him, occupy 'the right,' and that the South occupy 'the wrong?' What is the proposition? Where does it originate?" Cobb, like most southerners, lived in a society where their moral leaders had helped them justify black enslavement. He felt anger, the Georgian told Congress, because "the whole people of the Union are involved in a war with a foreign country," but "a large portion of the community shall be excluded from all participation in the advantages and benefits resulting from it."³⁹ To southerners this prohibition meant they held an inferior rank to northerners within the federal government.

Other southerners complained the Wilmot Proviso acted as a direct insult to slaveholders in the South. Supreme Court Justice Peter V. Daniel, who later would join the majority in the Dred Scott decision that overturned the possibility of restricting slavery, railed against the northern passage of the prohibition against the expansion of slavery. He wrote that it "pretends to an insulting exclusiveness or superiority on the one hand, and denounces a degrading inequality or inferiority on the other; which says in effect to the Southern man, Avaunt! You are not my equal, and hence are to be excluded as carrying a moral taint with you. Here is at once the extinction of all fraternity."⁴⁰

³⁹ *Congressional Globe* 29 Cong., 2 sess., 361; Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997): 28-49.

⁴⁰ Peter V. Daniel to Martin Van Buren, November 1, 1847, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress; Michael F. Holt, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004): 33.

Inferiority in the sense that he and other southerners meant, however, was not intended mean as men on a personal level or as a lesser or immoral people, but rather as citizens of equal standing under the government being treated as though they had less than full citizenship.

The proviso, some slaveholders worried, also imperiled the security and politics of the South. If they could not dominate the machinery of the federal government, the proslavery movement insisted, then only an equitable stake in federal power could offer the South safety. Having a pendulum of power that would swing back and forth between the two regions left the door open for radical abolitionists to take extreme actions. The fears originally brought about by the West Indian emancipation matured with the passage of the Wilmot Proviso. Channeling Robert Turnbull, who twenty years earlier had warned southerners about the growing strength of antislavery sentiment both in Parliament and the United States Congress, John C. Calhoun argued that the South could not abide losing more power at the federal level by allowing the creation of free states alone from the Mexican Cession. On the floor of the Senate he proclaimed that the people of the South "are in a minority in the [House of Representatives], in the electoral college [sic], and I may say, in every department of this Government, except at president [and in] in the Senate of the United States."⁴¹

The South Carolinian took offense to the proviso also. Continuing his discussion of the proviso in the Senate, he yelled to his audience, "I say for one, I would rather meet

⁴¹ *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 453-455. The senator's remarks also ran in newspaper coverage of the debate over the Wilmot Proviso, see Macon *Daily Telegraph*, March 2, 1847. Calhoun did not make reference to whether or not he believed the Supreme Court to be on the side of slaveholders in the South.

any extremity upon the earth, than give up one inch of our equality—one inch of what belongs to us as members of this great republic." Angered, he exclaimed, "What! acknowledge inferiority! The surrender of life is nothing to sinking down into acknowledgement of inferiority."⁴² Some historians have wrongly suggested that Calhoun had reacted in such a fashion because Wilmot threatened his conception of southern manhood and that the slaveholding rhetoric about equality and rights stemmed from a slight against their code of honor. The South Carolinian did, no doubt, consider honor an important aspect in his attacks against the proviso; however, his main basis for opposing Wilmot went beyond that, and involved a deeply rooted political outlook that developed in the slaveholding South throughout the first half of the nineteenth century as they perceived the repercussions of emancipation in the Caribbean.

After vowing never to accept inferiority, Calhoun clarified that he had the Abolitionist Power on his mind, proclaiming: "I have examined this subject largely—widely." Prepared to explain his position, he stated, "I think I see the future if we do not stand up as we ought. In my humble opinion, in that case, the condition of Ireland is prosperous and happy—the condition of Hindostan is prosperous and happy—the condition of Jamaica is prosperous and happy, to what the southern States will be if they should not now stand up manfully in defense of their rights."⁴³ John C. Calhoun clearly focused not on masculinity, but on England, and the recent emancipation of the West Indies, when he spoke of maintaining equality within the Union. Significantly, the three

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid; Holt, *The Fate Of Their Country*, 33; Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008): 191.

places he lists as "prosperous and happy" had all been subordinated under the British Empire. For Calhoun, to "stand up manfully" served as a call for southerners to stand up as free adult citizens in the American Republic rather than be subjugated by a distant capital that did not have the South's best intentions in mind.

Calhoun painted a clear portrait for those who listened to him. He argued that if southern slaveholders did not stand up for their right to carry slavery westward, they would be placed in the same situation as the former master class of Jamaica and the rest of the West Indies: bankrupt and outnumbered by former slaves—a mere colony reliant on help from outsiders, who held slavery in contempt, for the protection of their personal safety and wealth. Southern independence would be lost if Wilmot got his way because slaveholders would lose political power while simultaneously being surrounded by an ocean of free soil filled with whites who wanted little to do with black people—free or enslaved. The result, he feared, would be an already rising slave population growing in density as well, undermining both the value of the enslaved as well as the safety of every white slaveholder and non-slaveholder in the South.

Furthermore, the proslavery movement came to adopt the notion that the proviso overturned American exceptionalism. They began to resist the idea that the United States Constitution, and the federalism it established, fundamentally differed from the English government that Americans had abandoned in 1776. Pandora's box had been opened when proslavery southerners used the power of the federal government to get their way in the 1830s and early 1840s by claiming that the defense of slavery rested in the federal power of foreign diplomacy as much as it did among the states. The slaveholding South, led by Calhoun and other ardent defenders of their region's peculiar institution, now

needed to develop a way to reconcile a powerful federal government they had helped to create with the encroachment of the growing antislavery movement that appeared to be on the verge of claiming federal authority.

Throughout August 1847 the Charleston *Mercury*, an organ of Calhoun support, railed against the Wilmot Proviso and explained in further detail how Wilmot and his supporters planned to undermine the Constitution in order to make the American national government resemble the British Parliament, thus eroding the exceptional nature of the United States. In bold print the newspaper published the words, "The Wilmot Proviso is Abolition, Aggressive, Revolutionary, and subversive of the Constitution and its guaranties to the Slaveholding States." The *Mercury*, as well as many other proslavery outlets and supporters, believed the restriction of slavery from lands acquired from the Mexican War specifically worked to alter the character of the nation. In their minds, northerners who voted for the proviso wanted to spark a dramatic change in how the Constitution functioned by putting "the Constitution itself in the hands of Abolition." Northerners who hoped to pass Wilmot's prohibition of slavery's expansion wanted a revolution, a new form of government different from the one that currently existed in the United States. The *Mercury* concluded its initial examination of the proviso by explicitly saying, "A revolution is in progress by the Wilmot Proviso. The equality of states and of American citizens is destroyed....The guaranties of the Constitution, often disregarded, are about to be utterly overthrown and rendered useless; and the Constitution and Slavery are being transferred by the Wilmot movement to Abolition and its allies."⁴⁴ Antislavery

⁴⁴ Charleston *Mercury*, August 10, 11, 17, 1847.

northerners, these southern journalists explained, hoped to usurp the Constitution through revolutionary means. The *Mercury* alerted its readership that the idea of fomenting an abolitionist revolution had grown from foreign influence. The newspaper wrote, "Although a disposition existed with a class of individuals in this country to attack the slave institutions of the States, it was not until after the example of British West India Emancipation, that it was taken up by any of the States and became excited to dangerous activity and power."⁴⁵

The English had emboldened the abolitionist movement with their success in ending slavery in the Caribbean, the Charleston newspaper stated. It had begun when Massachusetts attempted to undermine the Negro Seaman Act of South Carolina after the Denmark Vesey scare in Charleston. That event was described by the *Mercury* as "a most dangerous insurrection...planned and instigated by foreign colored persons (St. Domingo) who had seduced the colored natives, free and slaves, into a bloody plot to murder the whites." Caribbean emancipation, the newspaper contended, had awoken "a kindred spirit at the North." The fanatics from Massachusetts had sent "agents with her commissions to invade the territories of South Carolina and Louisiana, to brave their authority, and to break the laws enacted to protect themselves from domestic insurrection and servile massacre."⁴⁶ The Wilmot Proviso, the South Carolina periodical declared, was just the next step of the Abolitionist Power's monumental conspiracy for destroying slavery in the United States, and therefore, the South.

⁴⁵ Ibid., August 11, 1847.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Other southern newspapers also publicized that foreigners had inspired the North to re-engage in abolitionism. The Macon *Weekly Telegraph*, for example, even took that notion a step further by connecting antislavery Democrats directly to a larger abolitionist movement that wanted to destroy the Constitution and slavery in the United States. The support for Wilmot did not just stem from only a few abolitionists who had forced the South's former allies into supporting the bill, the newspaper insisted. Instead, the conspiracy had a deep global tinge. As the author wrote, "They are brothers to the 'red republicans' of Paris....They have their allies with the British; and they are not wanting friends in the dominions of England, to render assistance to their fellow-devils in the United States, by way of the West Indies."⁴⁷ The Caribbean—once a base of support for slavery—now served as a launching point for abolitionist attacks that were propelled by Europeans who wanted to end the American way of government along with their goals of destroying slavery.

As Robert Turnbull had predicted at the time of British emancipation of the West Indies, the *Mercury* argued that abolitionists hoped to change the rules that governed the nation in order to achieve their goal of ending slavery in America, either directly through majority rule in Congress—as they did with the Wilmot Proviso—or indirectly, by creating so many free states from the Mexican Cession that an amendment to the Constitution could be pushed through on a purely sectional. The newspaper wrote that the abolitionists would soon "have two-thirds which are required to *propose* the amendments; and at no very remote day will have the three-fourths necessary to carry it, which will

⁴⁷ Macon *Weekly Telegraph*, July 25, 1848.

give to *their Congress* the power to abolish Slavery." Slavery needed to expand in order to protect itself from the fanatics who had gained control of the North and wanted to destroy the South's labor system they hated so much, southerners feared.

The Abolitionist Power, however, would first just use its newfound strength to frighten the South, the *Mercury* exhorted, writing, "The end aimed at is to get the power granted by the Constitution, not perhaps to exercise it at once, but to hold *in terrorem* over us, and by it to rule and subject us to whatever measures of taxation, revenue, or expenditure their interests may dictate; and eventually perhaps, at some moment of fancied interest, or under the excitement of feeling or fanaticism, to end our suspense by consummating the act."⁴⁸ The *Mercury* told readers that the "fanatics" did not simply want to end slavery—they also wanted to treat the South as though it were a colony of the North, extracting the region's wealth before finally crushing the slaveholding society they held in so much contempt. The proslavery movement had come to believe the antislavery movement did not just want to end slavery; it also wanted to punish the South for having owned slaves in the first place.

The fears of slaveholders that first arose after the Haitian Revolution and then during emancipation in the British West Indies again came to the forefront of southern political thought as those who read about the Wilmot Proviso anticipated what the future safety of slavery would look like if the proviso were implemented. Several southerners believed that cordoning off the slave states and surrounding them with free territory threatened not only future prosperity in the West for slaveholders, but the entire security

⁴⁸ Charleston *Mercury* August 11. 21, 1847.

of the South for the next generation of southern white citizens. They believed abolitionists, and the northern Democrats who suddenly found themselves aligned with them, were using Wilmot's restriction of slavery in the West as an attack against slaveholding in general. In response, many from the slave states found themselves not just defending the right to bring their slaves into the lands acquired from the Mexican War but also fortifying slavery where it already legally existed.

Just as when the news of English emancipation came to American shores in the 1830s, southerners defended slavery by contrasting it with free labor. Congressman Robert W. Roberts, from Mississippi, argued for slavery in the House of Representatives by comparing it to domestic servitude in the free states. Northern free labor had replaced English free labor in southern rhetoric that defended the enslavement of blacks in America. He said, "[Northerners] deem a limited servitude better adapted to their purpose: we regard an unlimited servitude the most proper and beneficial. Now is it asking too much to extend to us the same scope of judgment they claim for themselves? If servitude is wrong it must be wrong in all of its parts."⁴⁹ Both regions, he claimed, would be culpable if "servitude" were to be found immoral. The representative did his best to show that the divide separating North and South could be bridged if only northerners would understand that the two regions did not have significant differences about how America's government should function to protect slavery from outside interference.

⁴⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 134. See also Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *The Mind of the Master: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): *Class*, 649-679.

Several slaveholders took the nearly unanimous acceptance of Wilmot's Proviso by northern politicians, Whig and Democrat, as proof that abolitionism had gained a strong foothold in the mindset of northerners. Many suggested that northerners supported the proviso in order to gain an edge on their political competition, using slavery as a way to be re-elected. As an example of this, Shelton Leake of Virginia pointed to his colleague from Massachusetts—Robert Charles Winthrop—as a Whig who opposed the original appropriation for negotiating with Mexico for land but changed his vote in favor once Wilmot became added to the bill. The Virginian believed that the “spawned fanaticism in the North” caused Winthrop to change his vote in favor of something he first opposed.⁵⁰ Many of his region's former allies could still be redeemed, he believed. There was still time to change their votes that sided with "fanaticism." However, what most southerners did not understand was that the Democratic vote in favor of the Wilmot Proviso had less to do with slavery and more to do with the black population of the United States.

As debate in the House of Representatives raged over the reintroduction of the Wilmot Proviso, the author of the original prohibition of slavery in the West stood in Congress and explained, for himself and for those who joined him in voting in favor of the proviso, why he had risked such sectional strife during a period when, many believed, the nation could unite against the foreign enemy of Mexico. David Wilmot told the members of the House of Representatives that he wanted to "vindicate" himself from the charges of abolitionism that had been, and would continue to be, launched against him by

⁵⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 112.

both southern congressman and Democratic newspapers loyal to Polk. He so wanted his remarks to be recorded accurately that he would later transcribe them in the record himself. As the House listened intently, the Pennsylvanian reassured his fellow Democrats that he was, indeed, one of "the friends of the Administration." He stated, "I have stood at home, and fought single-handed—no, I was not single-handed, because my party was with me—but I have stood at home, and fought time and again, against the Abolitionists of the North...I have met them at their meetings and assailed them."⁵¹ Wilmot wanted his friends in Congress to have no doubt that he remained a Democrat faithful to Democratic policies and was not a convert conjoined to the fanatical beliefs of abolitionism.

Wilmot's actions, however, had much less to do with President Polk than with what he believed to be the southern domination of the federal government—something that many within the proslavery movement had been building for years. David Wilmot challenged southerners who asked for compromise, saying, "I would go as far as any man in this House for compromise. Were it a question of concession and compromise, I might perhaps say to the North, Concede again, as you have done before, bow to the South, as you have done on all previous occasions." The question, in the congressman's mind, however, regarded fairness and equal protection under the federal government, rather than compromise. Wilmot continued: "What, then, do we ask? Sir, we ask for neutrality of this Government on the question of slavery."⁵² The North, he told his southern colleagues, had decided to stand up for itself.

⁵¹ Ibid., 352-355.

⁵² Ibid., 353.

In their move to strengthen the federal government's protection of slavery against foreign enemies, especially with the annexation of Texas, southerners had overreached. Now, David Wilmot informed the House, northern Democrats had checked the South's excessive power. He reminded his colleagues, "I was in favor of the annexation of Texas. I supported it with the whole influence which I possessed, and I was willing to take Texas in as she was." Robert Walker's letter regarding the annexation of Texas and the promises he made took the brunt of the Pennsylvanian's ire. After talking about Walker's promise for future free states, he said, "We are fighting this war for Texas and for the South....Now, sir, we are told that California is ours. And all we ask in the North is, that the character of its territory be preserved." He asked, "Shall the South make this Government an instrument for the violation of its neutrality, and for the establishment of slavery in these territories, in defiance of the law [already established there by Mexico's abolition of slavery]?"⁵³

While many Democrats, including Wilmot, believed in the responsibility to protect slavery where it already existed, those in the North thought that it had reached its limits when southerners tried to expand slavery all the way to the Pacific. Again, Robert Walker's promises made to the North in order to assure the annexation of Texas came back to haunt the proslavery movement. Wilmot admitted that he believed slavery to be "a great political and great social evil" that "we will have to work out in our free Government here." He contended—as many future Republicans, including Wilmot himself—would in the 1850s, that the free, white enterprise system of labor in the North

⁵³ Ibid.

outpaced the South. He stated, "Contrast Michigan and Arkansas," which had both joined the Union less than a year apart from each other. "In twenty years," the Pennsylvanian continued, "Michigan has assumed a high position among the States of this Union. She has all the elements of a great State; cities, flourishing towns, and highly cultivated fields; with a population that outnumbers three or four times that of Arkansas. And yet Arkansas has even a better soil, even superior natural advantages."⁵⁴ Yet, the free state experienced better growth, the Pennsylvanian claimed. This national investment was what northern Democrats were fighting for when they voted in favor of the Wilmot Proviso.

Wilmot contended that slavery stagnated the economic and population growth of southern states. However, his opposition to slavery in the West seemed to stem from his disapproval of slaveholders bringing black people to any territory gained from the Mexican War, rather than to slavery itself. The congressman insisted that he offered his proviso because it helped fulfill Robert Walker's promise to funnel the black population away from the North and into the nations south of the United States. He reminded Congress, "Why, Mr. Walker told you, when he was urging the annexation of Texas, (and I admit the force of his argument,) annex Texas, and you open a frontier of two thousand miles bordering Mexico, where this slave and black population, as it shall increase and press upon the country, can pass off, and become mingled up with the mixed races of Mexico and South America."⁵⁵ As he spoke those words the gavel came down, disrupting him. Wilmot's time to talk on the floor of the House of Representatives had expired.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 355.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

By arguing that adding more land in the form of Texas would funnel away blacks from the northern states, Robert Walker had created a perfect storm by bridging antiblack sentiment and antislavery feelings regarding the Mexican Cession. The Wilmot Proviso thus had little to do with abolitionism, its author proclaimed, but rather secured the maintenance of a free, white republic. For Wilmot, creating slave territory to the west of Texas excluded his constituency that wanted nothing to do with black slaves, or black people for that matter, from the spoils of the Mexican War. In his revised remarks that he edited himself to be placed into the congressional record, Wilmot further clarified his stance on slavery, writing, "I have no squeamish sensitiveness upon the subject of slavery, no morbid sympathy for the slave." Instead, his goals stemmed from serving his own constituency. White northerners in the laboring class would not move to a place where slavery existed. Wilmot continued, "I plead the cause and the rights of white freemen. I would preserve to free white labor a fair country, a rich inheritance, where the sons of toil, of my own race and color, can live without the disgrace which association with negro slavery brings upon free labor."⁵⁶ The Pennsylvanian made sure that his intentions were clear. He wanted the proslavery followers of Robert Walker to keep their word. Wilmot and those who supported him, he had told Congress, planned to keep theirs.

Throughout the nineteenth century, slave insurrections both foreign and abroad influenced the South's politics and culture. Southerners understood history. Much like during the early 1830s, white southerners felt disturbed over a growing wave of outside

⁵⁶ *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 317; Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Vero Publishing, 1990): 154.

antislavery sentiment washing upon their slave society. During the aftermath of both the Haitian Revolution and the Turner insurrection, distress over the anticipation of a growing slave population lacking an outlet for excess slaves had frightened many. What made Wilmot's proviso doubly frightening for much of the planter class was the possibility of a federal government, controlled by this new antislavery coalition, that would not help the South maintain the safety of its peculiar institution. The loss of power to control the future of slavery in the West stood as an example that they could not count on northerners to defend them anymore. During the nineteenth century, slaveholders had become accustomed to using the fear of insurrection as a way to compel northerners to work with them to protect slavery. The tepid alliance between the slave South and free North had worked from the Haitian Revolution to West Indian emancipation. Now, however, it suddenly appeared to be cracking due to the pressure exerted on it during the fight over Texas.

Robert Walker's letter, and his ideas about Texas being a safety valve for excess slaves, had worked almost too well. Many southern intellectuals believed the expansion of slavery outside of the South offered the only way to keep their region safe from possible harm stemming from an overabundance of slaves. Others in Congress also supported Walker's idea about Texas. South Carolina Congressman Isaac Holmes thought that if the South were surrounded by free states, the region would be "smothered and overwhelmed by a festering population that was forbidden to migrate, pent in and walled around on the exhausted soil—in the midst of [an enslaved population] strong in idleness" who could be instigated by abolitionists to "revolt and murder." The South Carolinian called the slaveholding states' being hemmed in by land that illegalized black

enslavement the most “awful calamity...in the widest stretch of his imagination.” A safety valve was needed for a safe and stable slave system to be maintained.⁵⁷

Those who lived in a slave society knew that violence could erupt at any moment. Slave revolts had the possibility to affect the entire population of the South, slaveholder and yeoman, free and enslaved. Often pointing to the gruesome warfare that occurred in Haiti at the turn of the nineteenth century, slaveholders believed that without effective governmental mechanisms in place to maintain a strong ruling presence over the enslaved population, blacks would decline into a state of barbarism. As the slave population grew, many white southerners anticipated that maintaining tight control over their enslaved labor force only became more difficult, and the consequences of failure more disastrous. Many slave owners understood how dangerous their slaves could be. For the first time southerners, and especially the planter class, glimpsed the reality of being completely surrounded by territory they believed to be hostile to not just slavery but to blacks also.⁵⁸

Anticipation about the future played a significant role in the southern reactions to the Wilmot Proviso. For many, a Malthusian understanding of population theory told them that such a circumstance would lead to the destruction of not only slavery and the economic prosperity it brought to many slaveholders, but also their very lives. Several slaveholders looked past initial hopes of prohibiting the expansion of slavery to the West and glanced further in the future, beyond their own time. The Charleston *Mercury* published an estimation regarding the expected population statistics of the slave states in

⁵⁷ *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 28 Cong., 2 sess., 1845, 108; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, vol. 1, 418-423.

⁵⁸ Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 38-39.

1950, over a hundred years into the future, if the proviso became implemented. The newspaper worried about what would happen when the South, according to its calculations, had a population of 90 million people, over a third of whom were black, which the *Mercury* declared could "not participate in the improvements of the white race."⁵⁹ With that view in mind they prepared to defend themselves against the proviso, which they perceived as the first step towards their annihilation.

Just as they had during earlier debates over the extension of slavery, slaveholders worried about non-slaveholders leaving the slave states for the newly created free territory because "the lower classes of whites will have gradually passed off into the Free States, retreating before the cheaper labor of the blacks." The *Mercury* best expressed this fear, writing, "When a great body of the white population will have emigrated, as we have shown, the remainder, impelled by a sense of insecurity or disgusted with a land abandoned to hopelessness barbarism, will follow in the footsteps of the first, and the country be finally abandoned entirely to blacks." The South, the proslavery periodical cautioned, would be completely desolated by its future black majority because "their habits have never entirely forsaken their descendents in America; and left to their own control, they would rapidly return to barbarism, and invite for themselves the fate of the Aborigines of America." In response to the claim that whites would eventually have no choice but to "exterminate" the black population of the South, the *Mercury* told its

⁵⁹ Charleston *Mercury* August 25, 1847; James L. Huston, "Theory's Failure: Malthusian Population Theory and the Projected Demise of Slavery," *Civil War History* 55 (Sept. 2009): 354-381. According to the U. S. Census, the population of the slave states would actually only grow to roughly 50 million by 1950.

readers it "does not admit of a reasonable doubt."⁶⁰

As the Wilmot Proviso proved to the South that its power in Congress had begun to wane, a great number of southerners concluded that abolitionists intended to destroy the South by fomenting slave insurrections, creating dire consequences for all whites living in the slave states. Hemming in the South by surrounding it with either ocean or free soil served as part of that plan, they believed, and the proslavery movement made a vigorous effort to call out to their former allies in the North asking them to defend southerners against the "fanatics" who threatened the security of Union. During the discussion of the Wilmot Proviso in the House of Representatives, one Mississippi congressman, for example, stated that support for the proviso meant encouragement for the "canting Abolitionist, who secretly and stealthily, openly and fiendishly, overleaps the barriers of the Constitution, and tramples up its sacred guarantees, in order to undermine your rights and obliterate your privileges, scatters fire-brands, arrows, and death among you, envelops your house in flames, and murders your wife and children before your eyes, to him this soil is free. It is a city of refuge where he may [include] the avenger of blood." In the minds of several slaveholding proponents, a vote for the restriction of slavery became the equivalent of voting for slave revolts, much like voting for the recognition of Haiti or refusing to censor the abolitionist mailings had been labeled in years prior. Antislavery in any form threatened the health and well-being of everyone who lived in the slave South, the most ardent defenders of slavery claimed. Proslavery supporters in the South needed to separate northern allies who might help

⁶⁰ Charleston *Mercury*, August 25, 1847.

them defend their enslaved labor system from their abolitionist enemies, who now posed a serious threat to the safety of the South.⁶¹

The Charleston *Mercury*, still leading the slaveholder's response to the proviso, declared that the debate over restricting slavery to the South revolved around the present "security of the slave institution, even within our own States." The newspaper wrote, "Our safety can only be secure in our own hands. It can only be secured by union amongst ourselves, and by a resolute determination to preserve the equality of rights constitutionally ours." The South's northern allies could no longer be trusted. Abolitionists, the firebrand periodical announced, had plans to spur the rebellion of the enslaved with the proviso. The lives of all southerners were at risk, the *Mercury* warned, "We shall be surrounded by a population hostile to us. On every side girt round with those who will continually excite our slaves to insubordination and revolt, which it would be folly to suppose would forever be resisted." With power of the federal government in the hands of those who hated slavery, there would be little help from those outside the South in putting down an insurrection. "In it," the newspaper concluded, "we may see a servile war with all its horrors. If the white triumphs, victory itself will be death. If foreign aid," such as England, "make the slave the victor, misery far greater than death will follow him whose unbridled passions will find in the contempt of all restraint human and divine a theatre for its that will make humanity shutter."⁶² For white southerners—all white southerners—Wilmot portended a war to the death, much like the French had experienced during the Haitian Revolution, but worse—instead of being surrounded by

⁶¹ *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 134.

⁶² Charleston *Mercury* August 14, 16, 17, 1847.

ocean, American slaveholders would find themselves surrounded by hostility. Unlike their Caribbean counterparts, there would be little sympathy from the rest of the world.

Thomas Bayly, a Virginian, told the rest of Congress that opponents of slavery should be dealt with swiftly before they could do real damage to the South's slave society by empowering the abolitionists to strike at the southern institution once again. Abolitionists threatened to destroy the South through physical force, he told his colleagues in the nation's Capitol. He told the House that radical members of the antislavery movement had the goal of extinguishing slavery "at every hazard and by any means, even by deluging the South with blood."⁶³ If this were the case, the South needed to defend itself in order to prevent not only economic loss, but destruction of their property and their way of life. Northern moderates on the issue of slavery, the Virginian contended, needed to stop playing politics with slavery and protect the South from attacks launched by those who wanted to overturn the system through racial revolution.

Newspapers in the South pointed out their fear that abolitionists—now emboldened by the Wilmot Proviso—could cause upheaval throughout the South. In an article about Whig leadership in the federal government, a Florida newspaper said "[southern Whigs] must look at [abolitionists] as intending to be true to their pledges; as the deadly enemies of the dearest interests of your constituents and of the South; as the chosen leaders of those fanatics who will, if they can, liberate your slaves, even by fire and sword...prepare the way for the grand drama of Abolition, at whatever hazard, throughout the slaveholding states." James Henry Hammond and other slave owners

⁶³ Ibid.

warned their compatriots that the Free Soil movement challenged the southern way of life in places where slavery already existed. The restriction of slavery in the Mexican Cession was just the first step to ending slavery—possibly through the instigation to revolt by the enslaved themselves—by northerners who opposed the South’s labor system. Southern defenders of slavery needed to do everything they could to protect their region against the antislavery movement’s attempts at destroying their society.⁶⁴

The Haitian Revolution again gained currency in the language of the proslavery movement as they tried to diffuse the support for the Wilmot Proviso. With their large enslaved majority, white South Carolinians felt the most apprehension over the prospect of a Haitian-like slave rebellion. Whites in the Palmetto State often took extra precaution against slave insurrection. One visitor from Georgia described Charleston as similar to a town on the frontier "where the tocsin is sounded, and the evening drum beaten, and the guard set as regularly every night as if an invasion were expected. In Charleston, however, it is not the dread of foreign invasion, but of domestic insurrection." Furthermore, the former governor of the state, James Henry Hammond, worried that with the addition of only free states gained from the Mexican Cession, northerners would “ride over us rough shod, proclaim freedom or something equivalent to our Slaves and reduce us to the condition of Hayti...if we de do not act now, we deliberately consign our children, not our posterity, but *our* children to flames.” As the belief that preventing slavery from entering the West might lead to an eventual uprising of the enslaved gained acceptance in the South, it is not surprising that South Carolina leaders stationed

⁶⁴ Tallahassee *Floridian*, August 8, 1840; Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1982): 284.

themselves at the forefront of the opposition to the Wilmot Proviso.⁶⁵

Waddy Thompson, a former congressman from South Carolina, feared that the Wilmot Proviso would cause whites in the South to leave the region, joining the chorus of other southerners who worried about demographic change and its future consequences. Thompson wrote that the proviso's "victory is worse than fruitless—its ultimate result will be to convert [the South], the fruitful mother of heroes and statesmen, into another San Domingo Pandemonium—[where their] children will be forced to leave a soil consecrated by the blood of patriot ancestors...and see the marble on their tombs converted into hearth stones, and their graves ploughed over by a free negro proprietor." The South Carolinian believed that preventing the expansion of slavery to the West could only lead to a population dominated by blacks. Wilmot, some slaveholders worried, imperiled the South.⁶⁶

In the House of Representatives, Thomas Bayly reminded northerners that Ohioans had rejected a settlement of emancipated slaves in the summer of 1846. The congressman believed Wilmot's slavery stipulation would lead to the emancipation of the enslaved due to the political gains of antislavery membership in Congress and the creation of only free states in the West. Abolition meant race war, the Virginian warned. He asked his colleagues in the House to "look at Santo Domingo. It was almost a paradise. It was one of the most beautiful and prosperous portions of the earth. By the

⁶⁵ Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* ed. John A. Scott (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961): 39; Quoted in William Barney, *The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972): 104-105.

⁶⁶ *Greenville Mountaineer*, October 15, 1847.

means of a servile insurrection, instigated, and aided by British fanatics, the terrors of which no pen can describe, and no heart can contemplate...there was indiscriminate massacre of the whites, without regard to age, sex, or condition.” The congressman also insisted that such an insurrection stemming from emancipation could only lead to the “extermination” of either the white or black race in the United States where “the South is deluged in blood, and is made one vast scene of desolation.” Many slaveholders contended that Haiti proved that whites and blacks could not live peacefully in an integrated society. They tried to frame the debate so that whites in the North had to choose between their own race and the enslaved blacks. Wilmot’s proviso also forced many in the South to focus on their own region’s safety instead of national issues that crossed sectional lines.⁶⁷

The sectional tendency of the vote for the Wilmot Proviso also made some southerners change their mind about their devotion to the Union, especially if the Constitution seemed to be changing to resemble foreign governments that had initiated emancipation. During the Nullification Crisis in South Carolina, Benjamin F. Perry sided with Andrew Jackson and the power of the federal government. He had been a proslavery Unionist. However, with the passage of the Wilmot Proviso, the South Carolinian denounced the amendment as an antislavery plot. He postulated that the enactment of Wilmot would lead to the eventual freedom of blacks, and then to their domination of the electorate because “in most of our Districts and Parishes in South Carolina, there is a majority of Slaves, and being set free, [they] could carry all the

⁶⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 1847, 348. Framing the slavery issue as one between choosing in favor of whites or blacks would be common theme throughout the 1850s, for a famous example see the Lincoln-Douglas debates, especially the debate at Charleston, Illinois.

elections, and fill all the public offices.” Once the former slaves dominated the population of southern society more than they already did in some heavily enslaved states, Perry contended, blacks would “intermarry with [white] children” and serve in Congress. He pointed out that antislavery proponents did not even give free blacks in the North the equality that they intended to implement in the South. He assumed that this came from the northern understanding of the danger posed by a free, burgeoning black population. In defending slavery against restriction from the lands of the Mexican Cession, southerners strengthened their own intellectual defense of their regional labor system as a whole.⁶⁸

After the House adopted the Wilmot Proviso for a second time in February 15, 1847, John C. Calhoun also foresaw a scenario in which the continuation of antislavery attacks on slavery might lead to the destruction of the South. Regaining the clout he had lost for opposing the Mexican War, the senator led the defense of slavery and the slaveholding states against the Wilmot Proviso. From the Senate floor Calhoun explained the southern resistance to proposed restriction of slavery in the West. He said, "Our opposition rests on the ground that they will be ruinous to us, if not effectually resisted. We know what we are about; we foresee what is coming, and move with no other purpose but to protect our portion of the Union from the greatest calamities—not insurrection, but something worse. [The expulsion] in time [of] the white population of the Southern States and [will] leave the blacks in possession [of the South]."⁶⁹ The senior

⁶⁸ Pendleton, Sc. *Messenger*, December 17, 1847.

⁶⁹ *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* vol. XXIV eds. Clyde N. Wilson and Shirley Bright Cook (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999): 190.

statesman of South Carolina believed that if "those influences on the other side be permitted to go on, the result of the whole will be, that we shall have St. Domingo over again."⁷⁰

Calhoun reminded those in Congress that the federal government had the constitutional duty to protect slavery in the United States in an active fashion. He asked, "[was] this government, under the solemn guarantee on of the Constitution, entered into by all the States, to protect the government of each other against domestic violence...not bound to adopt the most efficient measures to prevent the policy of the British government in reference to Texas, and which must have ended in insurrectionary movements in the neighboring States, from being carried into effect?" The former nullifier challenged northern supporters of slave restriction in the West. If the federal government had the duty to annex Texas because it protected the South from the effects of British emancipation, how could the Wilmot Proviso be legal? Southerners, the senator proclaimed, demanded that those in the North stay true to their constitutional duty and to protect slaveholders from their slaves by opposing the Wilmot Proviso.⁷¹

The Wilmot Proviso offered John C. Calhoun the perfect opportunity to regain his position as leader of the proslavery movement. He told his followers that he wanted the South to take the fight to the North instead of just reacting to antislavery forces in Congress, and he suggested that the South attack constitutional stipulations that favored most of the free states. Specifically, he recommended the exclusion of northern ships and

⁷⁰ Ibid., XXV, 347.

⁷¹ *State and Federal Relations: The States and the United States*, IV ed. Herman V. Ames (Philadelphia: Department of History, University of Pennsylvania, 106): 4-7.

commerce from southern ports, creating a proslavery boycott of goods produced by free state industry. He threatened northerners with action and told antislavery senators, “If your vessels cannot come into our ports without the danger of such piratical acts...you have caused this state of things by violating the provisions of the Constitution and the act of Congress for delivering up fugitive slaves, by passing laws to prevent it, and thus make it impossible to recover them when they are carried off by such acts, or seduced from us, we have the right, and are bound by the high obligation of safety to ourselves.” While such an embargo might hurt the South economically, he hoped that this action might bring northern moderates on the issue of Wilmot’s amendment back to the side of the South and the protection of slavery. Economic security was less important than physical safety.⁷²

The most ardent defense of slavery offered by John C. Calhoun came in the form of a call upon all of the southern state governments to pass legislation rejecting the proviso. As an example for local politicians to follow, he offered a resolution to the Senate that explained the proslavery position on the prohibition of slavery from the Mexican Cession. In response the Virginia legislature unanimously passed a denunciation of the proviso. Calling it "The Platform of the South," the Virginia legislature, using almost the exact same language as Calhoun, resolved that “the government of the United States has no control, directly or indirectly, mediately or immediately, over the institution of slavery, and that in taking any such control, it transcends the limits of its legitimate functions by destroying the internal organization of

⁷² Ibid.

the sovereignties who created it.” Other slaveholding state governments, such as Alabama and Georgia, followed the Old Dominion’s lead and passed similar condemnations of Wilmot’s amendment. Slaveholders would protect their labor institution with or without the help of the federal government.⁷³

Calhoun and his allies in southern state legislatures did not stop with the regulation of slavery in the Mexican Cession. They continued by attacking the authority of the federal government to regulate slavery in any land acquired by the nation, even north of the traditional Missouri Compromise line many regarded as the standard of compromise on the issue. Their resolution further stated: “That all territory which may be acquired by...the United States...belongs to the several states of this union, as their joint and common property, in which each and all have equal rights” and called any “enactment by the federal government of any law which should directly or by its effects prevent the citizens of any state from emigrating with their property of whatever description into such territory” a “derogation of that perfect equality that belongs to the several states as members of this Union, and would tend directly to subvert the Union itself.”⁷⁴ With the adoption of the Platform of the South, ardent proslavery advocates blamed antislavery sentiment for any cracks that occurred to the Union over the issue of slavery in the territories. The reactions by slaveholders to the Wilmot Proviso helped to create the intellectual foundation for the radical defense of slavery. If the federal government was not going to use its power to defend slavery, as it had done decades prior, southerners would work to weaken Washington's power.

⁷³ Ibid; *Charleston Mercury*, August 11, 1847.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Despite President Polk and the Democratic-controlled Senate eventually finding a way to garner enough votes in the House to negotiate lands away from Mexico without the Wilmot Proviso, its initial passage in the House of Representatives by a nearly sectional vote became a turning point in American history that would loom large for over a decade. The negative southern reaction to the proviso did not arise simply out of response to an insult or fear of economic disadvantage in the future. Rather, southerners contended that northern support for Wilmot signaled the enhanced strength of the antislavery movement in the free states, which for decades had been feared as southerners watched slavery end in the Caribbean and worried about the growing sway that the abolitionists in England had over one of the most powerful nations in the world. How slaveholders responded to Wilmot was greatly influenced by decades of previous history, and the decisions of prior generations.

A major component in the reaction of the South to the Wilmot Proviso stemmed from the fear of slave insurrection similar to one experienced by French slaveholders on their former colony of Saint Domingue. Many in the South worried that in the future such a bloody upheaval of their own society might take place. Slaveholders anticipated a day in which their enslaved population would grow too large to control if slavery's restriction from the West became law, especially with a federal government dominated by those hostile to the South's enslaved labor system. Many believed the only inevitable outcome of being hemmed in by free soil was a deadly race war in which either whites or blacks would be removed from the land. This belief had been developed for decades among southern intellectuals as slaveholders reacted to various insurrection plots, real or imaginary, domestic and abroad.

The Wilmot Proviso became a tipping point in the politics of slavery in the United States by granting the opportunity for proslavery radicals to gain a foothold in the mindset of the South; the proviso tarnished the trust between slaveholders and those in the North who willfully supported slavery for political gain for years. Many pro-southern political and intellectual leaders began to believe that Robert Turnbull had been right when he said abolitionists would eventually overrun the American federal government in the same fashion that they did Parliament. Tapping into the fear that an Abolitionist Power aimed for the violent destruction of their society, radical leaders of the proslavery movement gained confidence as they organized an opposition to the proviso by calling for the legalization of slavery throughout all of the United States territories, not just below the line of latitude struck during the sectional bargaining of the Missouri Compromise. These southerners wanted the South to act in an aggressive manner against the antislavery movement, just as they had during the 1830s as slavery became abolished in the Caribbean.

Stemming directly from the reaction to the Wilmot Proviso, the Platform of the South gave fire-eaters an intellectual foundation from which to start challenging American exceptionalism by questioning how different the Constitution was from other forms of government, especially Parliament, thus eroding the belief throughout the slave states that the American form of government was different from the rest of the world, something northerners still forthrightly believed. From 1846 until the 1860, Wilmot's proviso became a political litmus test for politicians, both in the free and slave states. Political leaders tried to find a way to bridge the divide caused by the issue of whether or not to allow slavery into the American West, but they were fighting several decades of

history. Beliefs and anticipations for the future that had developed since the 1790s would not be easily assuaged by the simple give and take of the American political tradition of compromise.

Chapter Seven

The Southern Turn Against American Exceptionalism

Experience has proved, that slaveholding States cannot be safe, in subjection to non-slaveholding States. Indeed, as no people can ever expect to preserve its rights and liberties, unless these be in its own custody. To plunder and oppress, where plunder and oppression can be practiced with impunity, seems to be the natural order of things. The fairest portions of the world elsewhere, have been turned into wildernesses; and the most civilized and prosperous communities, have been impoverished and ruined by anti-slavery fanaticism.

-The Address of South Carolina To Slaveholding States, December 25, 1860¹

The Wilmot Proviso's passage in the House of Representatives had an immediate impact on the course of politics in the United States. In the election of 1848 both Whigs and Democrats faced sectional predicaments. Each party hoped to show the South that they could be trusted on the issue of protecting slavery without disenchanting the North, where opposition to slavery was steadily growing. In the North a new party had been formed out of emboldened antislavery proponents who had not only overturned the gag rule and passed the Wilmot Proviso but also worked to end the slave trade in the nation's capital.² Spurred by the positive reception of Wilmot's legislation in the free states, antislavery politicians formed this third party out of a coalition of northern Whigs (who opposed slavery mostly because of moral reasons), northern Democrats (who mostly opposed the expansion of slavery on racial grounds), and former members of the Liberty

¹ *Journal of the Convention of the People of South Carolina, Held in 1860, 1861, and 1862* (Columbia, SC: R. W. Gibbes, 1862): 473.

² For the long history of slavery in the nation's capital see Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 49-88. The proslavery movement saw the debate over regulating slavery and the slave trade in Washington, D.C. as another example of Robert Turnbull's prophecy about abolitionism during British emancipation of the West Indies as coming true.

Party. With this new coalition, the Free Soil Party was born. The organizers of the new party, meeting in Buffalo, New York, announced that they gathered "as a union of freemen, for the sake of freedom, forgetting all past political differences in a common resolve to maintain the rights of free labor against the aggressions of the Slave Power, and to secure free soil to a free people" and supported "the National Platform of Freedom, in opposition to the sectional Platform of Slavery."³

The Free Soilers nominated former occupant of the White House Martin Van Buren as their first presidential candidate. In a remarkable display of the changes that had reverberated through slavery politics, the party named their vice-presidential candidate Charles Francis Adams, the son of the recently deceased John Quincy Adams. Though Van Buren and Adams had been political enemies in the 1820s, they now joined forces against expanding slavery to the West. Armed with the slogan, "Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Speech, Free men," the new party hoped to rally the North to its side by making slavery in the territories—not slavery where it had already been established in the South—a major issue in the national election.⁴

³ O. C. Gardiner, *The Great Crisis or, Three Presidential Candidates Being A Brief Historical Sketch of the Free Soil Question in the United States, From The Congresses 1774 and '87 to the Present Time* (New York: WM. C. Bryant and Company, 1848): 138-139; Joel H. Silbey, *Party Over Section: The Rough and Ready Presidential Election of 1848* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009): 76-85, 164-166; Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1970): 201-230; Leonard Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000): 154-155; Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2004): 161-169; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (W. W. Norton and Company, 2005): 602-628. For a discussion on the creation of the Free Soil Movement in New York, see Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 49-77.

⁴ Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 76-78; Rayback, *Free Soil*, 228-229; Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 163-168.

Hoping to compete in the South without losing the North, the Whigs and the Democrats each devised ways around the Wilmot Proviso. Democrats needed to choose a new candidate who would appeal to voters at a national level. Three candidates for the nomination emerged at the beginning of the convention: Levi Woodbury, a former senator from New Hampshire and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court appointed by Polk; James Buchanan, a former senator from Pennsylvania who was the current Secretary of States; and Lewis Cass, senator from Michigan and former Secretary of War for Andrew Jackson—none of these men owned slaves. They hoped to balance the ticket by nominating for vice president William Orlando Butler, a Kentuckian known more for his accolades as a commander of troops during the Mexican War than for his loyalty to slavery.⁵

In order to garner votes in the South, the Democratic Party clearly stated that "Congress has no power under the Constitution to interfere with or control the domestic institutions of the several States." However, the party said very little about the issue of slavery in the territories in its official doctrines. Furthermore, as a way to prove their party stood for the Union, Democrats resolved that "all efforts of the Abolitionists or others made to induce Congress to interfere with questions of slavery, or to take incipient steps in relation thereto, are calculated to lead to the most alarming and dangerous consequences." Democrats depicted themselves as Unionists who wanted to protect the sanctity of the Constitution while simultaneously assuring slaveholders that their slave property remained safe from federal intervention. Abolitionists would have to cast their

⁵ Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 62-65. Robert E. May, *John A. Quitman: Old South Crusader* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1985): 212-215.

votes for someone else, they declared. By focusing little attention to the role Congress played regarding slavery in the territories, the party hoped to avoid the issue of the Wilmot Proviso, both in the North and South.⁶

Lewis Cass, however, knew he could not simply avoid the Wilmot Proviso by ignoring slavery in the western territories. The presidential candidate hoped to walk a fine line between sectional tensions over slavery by supporting a form of popular sovereignty—discussed as an alternative during the initial furor over Wilmot's proposed prohibition of slavery in the Mexican Cession—that would grant control over slavery to those who actually lived in new territories. A few months before the convention, Cass answered an inquiry from a Tennessee Democrat about his position by composing a long letter discussing the Constitution and the American ideals of self-government. He wrote, "I am opposed to the exercise of any jurisdiction by Congress over this matter; and I am in favor of leaving to the people of any territory, which may be hereafter acquired, the right to regulate it for themselves, under the general principles of the Constitution."⁷ A week later, his letter was published in the *Washington Union*. The Michigander hoped that by taking power to regulate slavery in the territories and giving it to the people themselves, he could satisfy both antislavery northerners and proslavery southerners.

However, the Democratic platform did not go far enough for some ardent defenders of slavery. Months earlier, the Democratic Party of Alabama had developed a

⁶ Porter and Johnson, eds, *National Party Platforms*, 10-12; Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 65-67.

⁷ Gardiner, *The Great Crisis*, 43; Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997): 84-86; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976): 56-64.

platform for their state's delegates that commanded their delegation not to vote for any candidate who had voted for the Wilmot Proviso or who might hinder the expansion of slavery in the territories in general. The proslavery movement wanted the federal government to actively protect slavery as it had done during the decades before. The Alabama platform unequivocally stated that Congress could not regulate slavery in the states or any of the territories—directly challenging supporters of the Wilmot Proviso. The proslavery movement decided to take a stand against what they deemed a weak attempt by Democrats to avoid facing the issue directly. Many in the South believed that without the expansion of slavery the white population of the South would dwindle, leaving a larger, more dangerous slave population behind.⁸

The proponents of the Alabama platform argued that Cass had to do more to protect slavery. Granting the citizens of the West full power to decide whether slavery would exist in American territories did not satisfy these radical supporters of the South's peculiar institution. Rather, they took the defense of slavery a step further than the Democratic Party did, claiming that the enslavement of blacks must be protected everywhere and in every territory until statehood had been achieved. While the Free Soilers championed freedom as a national ideal and slavery as a sectional one, William Lowndes Yancey and like-minded leaders in the proslavery movement proclaimed the opposite. Though it would be roundly praised in the southern press, Democrats in Baltimore overwhelmingly rejected the radical proslavery platform by a 216 to 36 vote.

⁸ Eric H. Walther, *William Lowndes Yancey: The Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 101-104; J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978): 172-175; Macon *Weekly Telegraph* January 7, 1851.

Yancey and one other delegate left the convention in protest, regarding rejection of their platform as evidence that northern Democrats were not serious about protecting slavery from the threats of the antislavery movement. Popular sovereignty, for now, would provide the Democratic Party with adequate justification to oppose the Wilmot Proviso.⁹

The Whigs adopted a much different strategy. As an organization propelled by such antislavery politicians as John Quincy Adams, Whig leaders knew slaveholders analyzed its party with great caution. Bereft of political experience or acumen, Zachary Taylor therefore emerged at the beginning of the Whig national convention in Philadelphia as their presumptive nominee. Some in the party worried that he was unfit for the presidency. One Whig who knew Taylor well said he was "an honest, plain, unpretending old man who, if left to his own course, would be as honest as it is possible for a man to be, but about as fit for the President of these United States as any New England Farmer that one might select out of a thousand, with his eyes shut." Another member of the party, Congressman Horace Mann, writing after the election that would make Taylor president, stated that the former general "talks as artlessly as a child about affairs of State, and does not seem to pretend to a knowledge of any thing of which he is ignorant." Zachary Taylor would prove that during volatile times, a lack of understanding of politics or government policy did not preclude a candidate from running a successful presidential campaign in a democracy.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 67.

¹⁰ Quoted in John C. Waugh, *On The Brink of Civil War: The Compromise of 1850 and How it Changed the Course of American History* (Wilmington, DL: Scholarly Resources, 2003): 34-35; Mary Tyler Peabody Mann, *Life of Horace Mann* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1904): 292. Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 259-330.

Despite a sizeable opposition who feared Taylor did not actually believe in Whig principles, the former Mexican War general managed well the officers of the convention. Old Rough and Ready—a nickname garnered during his long career in the military dating back to the War of 1812—never trailed on a ballot for the nomination. Despite only partially committing to the Whig program, Taylor won the nomination based on one single asset that his opponents lacked: he was a slaveholder and war hero highly regarded in the North. He was thus electable at a time when the country was divided on contentious issues, most significantly the Wilmot Proviso and the question of slavery's future in the territories. To balance the ticket Millard Fillmore—a former congressman from Buffalo who had opposed the annexation of Texas and once complained about the South's domination of Congress—was nominated for vice president.¹¹

Though capable of speaking in generalities about internal improvements or the tariff, Zachary Taylor's quest for the presidency in 1848 revolved primarily around his personal story as an anti-partisan leader who refused to advocate strictly northern or southern, Whig or Democrat, solutions on the campaign trail. He told America that he was a different kind of candidate, one who would be a post-partisan leader in a nation that saw sectional tension threatening the union. His supporters claimed that he was "the people's candidate," a man more loyal to his country than to any political party. As a Whig stated in one campaign pamphlet, "To love him, it is only necessary for his countrymen to know him, not alone as a soldier, but as a man and a citizen." The pamphlet went on to share stories from his time in the army and included sections about

¹¹ Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 68-71. Paul Finkelman, *Millard Fillmore* (New York: Times Books, 2011): 24.

"his morality and temperance" and "his modesty and unassuming manners" as well as praise for his familiarity "with human suffering" because "General Taylor's heart is filled with the tenderest sympathies, and quickens to the noblest impulses."¹² Old Rough and Ready refused to be cornered by the issues brought upon American politics because of the Wilmot Proviso. Instead, Whigs hoped that a slaveholder with good war stories would trump the ideas of a midwestern senator who hoped to find compromise over slavery in the West.

Because Taylor refused to engage in any political fight, he was able to bridge the sectional tensions caused by Wilmot just a few years earlier. He served as a blank slate that partisans could project their belief on and tell themselves that he was their man. Massachusetts Whigs tried to paint Taylor as being completely in favor of the Wilmot Proviso, attacking Martin Van Buren as a "Northern man with Southern principles" for his role in the effort to censor newspapers during the abolitionist postal campaign and attacking the former president's role in preventing slavery in the nation's capital from being discussed, quoting him as saying, "I must go into the Presidential chair the *inflexible and uncompromising opponent of any attempt to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, against the wishes of the slaveholding states.*" The party leaders insisted that the "few dissatisfied Whigs" who felt "indignant at the attempt of the slave power to extend [slavery] into territory now free" should understand that forming a third party

¹² *A Sketch of The Life and Public Services of General Zachary Taylor the People's Candidate for the Presidency, with Considerations in Favor of his Election* (Washington, DC: J. T. Towers, 1848): 1, 24-25; Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 108-110. Democrats did indeed try to counter stories of their own about Cass, for example, one pamphlet connected Cass to Jefferson by publishing the nomination of Cass for a marshal post in Ohio by the writer of the Declaration of Independence and third president. See *A Sketch of the Life and Public Services of General Lewis Cass*, YA Pamphlet Collection, Library of Congress.

would not suffice in standing up to slaveholders. Taylor, they insisted, represented the perfect candidate to stand up to southern interests because he was "not only a Whig" but also a "free soil Whig...who many years ago declared his attachment to the free soil principle." With a northerner in Fillmore, who the party insisted was "known and appreciated" throughout Massachusetts and "by every freeman in this Commonwealth," they would have someone who "would give his casting vote against the extension of slavery."¹³ The Whig ticket, even with a slaveholder, northern Whigs declared to their fellow citizens in the free states, could be trusted to resist adding slavery to the western territories.

In the South, Whigs told southerners the opposite. When Democrats in the South tried to tie Old Rough and Ready to the Wilmot Proviso by insisting that he would have to be loyal to antislavery Whigs in the Northeast, his party's base, southern Whigs pointed to his being a slaveholder. Attempting to show their candidate's allegiance with the South on the issue of the Wilmot Proviso, some southern advocates successfully contrasted Taylor's southernness with Cass as a way to alleviate fear that his northeastern supporters would control the Whig nominee. For example, James Henry Hammond wrote in his diary his thoughts about the election and Taylor that encapsulates this idea:

"Taylor, a slaveholder, pure, firm, and patriotic and of sound judgment, I still prefer him and would vote for him." Southerners trusted one of their own, Hammond continued, "As a Southern man and slaveholder, I thought the South should support him without regard to party, especially as Cass was openly anti-slavery." Hammond liked Taylor's explicit

¹³ *Address adopted by the Whig State Convention, at Worcester, September 13, 1848. Together with the Resolutions and Proceedings*, 9-12.

promise to rise above party politics and "to be a moderate Whig and an Independent candidate who would accept support from all parties, but bind himself to none." Others, such as the Democrats of Virginia, proclaimed to their fellow citizens that Taylor's election would eventually lead to "your homes, and your fields" flowing "with the blood of yourselves and your neighbors, shed by servile hands in a civil war." The refutation of the Wilmot Proviso was the major issue for most southerners.¹⁴

In the end, proslavery southerners would have to decide who they trusted more: a Democratic Party that had protected slavery for decades but now nominated a northerner with a spotty record on slavery; or the Whigs—a party filled with those morally opposed to slavery that had nominated a slaveholding war hero who portrayed himself as an anti-partisan leader opposed to Wilmot's contentious proposal. When the votes were tallied, the slave states split evenly, with Cass and Taylor each winning six slave states. Taylor, however, won the Electoral College majority in the North with a different sectional divide: Cass won every state in the Northwest while Taylor won every state in the Northeast with the exception of Maine and New Hampshire. The Free Soil campaign of Van Buren won 10 percent of the popular vote, but the cause of excluding slavery in new territory would not yet galvanize an electoral majority in the free states. Old Rough and Ready, running as a man who would rise about sectional tension, had been elected the

¹⁴ Carol Bleser, ed., *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988): 189-191. *Address Of The Democratic State Convention To The People Of Virginia* in *Richmond Enquirer*, September 26, 1848. Whigs in the South contrasted Taylor with Cass by stating that he in fact did support the Wilmot Proviso, for example, In one pamphlet they quoted him as saying, "He would have voted for it, if he had voted at all, last year." See *Facts for those who will understand them: Gen. Cass's Position on the Slavery Question Defined By Himself and His Friends*. (Washington: J. & G. S. Gideon 1848). See also Zachary Taylor to Jefferson Davis, April 20, 1848 in *The Papers of Jefferson Davis* ed. James T. McIntosh (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981): 3: 304-311. Southern Democrats tried to tie Wilmot to Zachary Taylor see *Milledgeville Federal Union*, July 4, 1848.

twelfth president of the United States. It would be the final time a slaveholder would ever reside in the White House.¹⁵

In January 1848, as the two parties prepared to choose who they would nominate in their upcoming elections, James W. Marshall, who had been hired to build a sawmill in California on the American River, recovered a few flakes of metal from his water wheel. The carpenter immediately knew what it was—gold. At first, news of Marshall's find was viewed with skepticism in the East. However, when President Polk officially affirmed in his State of the Union address to Congress that gold had been found in California, the mad dash was on. California became a national—even international—sensation. Hundreds of thousands of fortune-seekers migrated to the American territory upon hearing news that laborers in the West were making as much as twenty-five times the wages of their eastern counterparts. California's population swelled. Nearly 300 million dollars worth of gold would be mined from the California soil over the next six years. As the territory's population grew, the proslavery movement waited to see how the new president would handle the issue of slavery in California—a large portion of which was south of the old Missouri Compromise line.¹⁶

Polk anticipated that the gold rush would cause a massive population increase in California. In his final State of the Union address in 1849 he asked Congress to organize the territory despite political reservations regarding the Wilmot Proviso. The president worried that without organization, Californians would launch a revolution of their own and declare themselves free from United States control. Polk told Congress that he would

¹⁵ Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 129-146.

¹⁶ Malcolm J. Rohrbough, "The California Gold Rush as a National Experience," *California History* 77 (Spring 1998): 16-29.

accept the extension of the Missouri Compromise line or any similar alternative that would pass. His main imperative was to ensure that California remained under United States jurisdiction as thousands of people from all over the world came to the Pacific Coast in search of striking it rich.¹⁷

One such alternative to the extension of the Missouri Compromise line came from Stephen A. Douglas, the recently elected senator from Illinois. On the day that Polk asked Congress to act, Douglas proposed that the entire Mexican Cession be brought into the Union as one state, thus avoiding the Wilmot Proviso altogether. Though Polk supported the idea, others in Congress believed that such a large state would be too difficult to manage, despite the bill's provision allowing additional states to be carved out of the territory in the future. The loudest opposition came from the two extreme sides of the Wilmot Proviso. Antislavery northerners declared that they would accept nothing short of implementing a total prohibition of slavery in the Mexican Cession. The proslavery movement, meanwhile, castigated the Douglas bill as an attempt to pass the proviso by whitewashing it. Proslavery southerners had begun to distrust northern Democrats after the passage of the Wilmot Proviso. These contentions would put the issue on hold, leaving a new Congress and the novice President Taylor to work out a compromise.¹⁸

Zachary Taylor, whether from his lack of political experience or his arrogance as America's latest war-hero president, believed that he could rise above the Wilmot-generated sectional partisanship that had created a deadlocked Congress during the second half of his predecessor's term. Accepting the trope that slavery could never exist

¹⁷ Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 96-100.

¹⁸ Ibid, 100-101; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 76.

in the West—as had Polk—and believing that severe reactions to proslavery southerners had derived only from politicians hoping to score political points, the new president adopted a policy regarding western territory that proved to many southerners that they had been fooled into believing that Old Rough and Ready was more of a slaveholder and less of a Whig. Taylor's time in office would instigate a crisis that nearly split the Union and showed the proslavery movement a glimpse of what a president not devoted to slavery could do. After Taylor's presidency, southern radicals would demand a president devoted to using the federal government to protect slavery in the West.¹⁹

Taylor's underestimation of proslavery southerners' fear of being surrounded by free soil caused further division during a time when many hoped to move past the controversy sparked by the Wilmot Proviso. In August 1849, just months into his presidency, Taylor took a stance on the westward expansion of slavery that caused southerners to reconsider their loyalty to the Union. The new president sent a commission, led by the slaveholder Thomas Butler King, to California with instructions to promote the creation of a state government that, most likely, would request the territory's entrance as a free state into the Union. Realizing that using free soil language would help his party win seats in the midterm elections, the new president told a crowd in

¹⁹ For an overview of the Taylor presidency see Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1988): 1-158. It is a curious phenomenon that many thoughtful historians tend to believe enslaved blacks somehow could not work in the same capacity as the low-paid Asian and Irish immigrants who filled many of the jobs in the West after the Civil War. The plantation system did not have to be utilized for slavery to be profitable in the lands of the Mexican Cession. Many slaveholders used their enslaved workers in factories or mines in the South and slavery had shown itself to be adaptable to industry, see Charles B. Dew, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 195): 107; W. David Lewis, *Sloss Furnaces and the Rise of the Birmingham District: An Industrial Epic* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994): 33-34, and Richard J. Follett, "The Sugar Masters: Slavery, Economic Development, and Modernization on Louisiana Plantations, 1820-1860," PhD dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1997, 377-339.

Mercer, Pennsylvania: "The people of the North need have no further apprehension of the extension of slavery." He promised his audience that the Whigs could function as the vehicle for free soil and issued an executive order warning Americans that any efforts they made to spark revolution in Cuba would be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Taylor, the slaveholder who many proslavery southerners had trusted on the issue of blocking the Wilmot Proviso, abruptly condemned attempts by proslavery southerners to annex additional slave territory to the United States.²⁰

Many proponents of the proslavery movement supported a formal response from the slave states against Taylor's actions. As he had done in reaction to the Wilmot Proviso, John C. Calhoun warned that the policy pushed by the administration would turn the South into a mere colony of the North. He wrote a letter that he hoped every southern congressman would sign, condemning the impetuous actions of antislavery members of Congress. Antislavery northerners "disturbed" the "tranquility" of the South with "systematic agitation." He told the Congress in a speech titled the "Southern Address" that the efforts to prohibit the extension of slavery and abolish the slave trade in the District of Columbia would result in the North "holding the white race at the South in complete subjection."²¹ The Abolitionist Power had been planning on these actions for years. Calhoun believed that the South needed to respond to the antislavery movement in unison and hoped that southerners would rally behind his letter. This endeavor ultimately

²⁰ Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 269-271; speech quoted in Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore*, 94; James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1908*, volume V (Washington, DC: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1908): 7-8.

²¹ *Niles' National Register*, vol. LXXV, 84-88.

failed. Though some southern legislatures would later approve of the idea, only 48 out of the 121 southern members of Congress agreed to sign the document.²²

As the issue of slavery in California went unresolved throughout 1849, proslavery politicians began to move towards Calhoun's position. Southern members of the proslavery movement viewed the issues of extending slavery to the West and protecting the slave trade in the nation's capital as examples of free state abolitionists' desire to change the relationship between the federal government and the South. Historians of the sectional crisis have pointed to the speech of Robert Toombs during the heated contest for the election of the Speaker of the House in December 1849 as evidence of this growing separation between the North and the South. Toombs, a Georgia congressman who had rejected Calhoun's call for southern unity just eleven months before, railed against antislavery Whigs and Democrats in late 1849, proclaiming that if slavery were kept from New Mexico and California he would have no choice but to declare "for disunion." However, when put into the context of the southern reaction to the emancipation of the West Indies in the 1830s—where they watched the planter class there lose any sense of representation in Parliament—the background of his claim that northerners attempted "to fix a national degradation upon the States of this Confederacy" becomes clearer.²³ In this light, it appears that southerners had anticipated for decades the southern response to Taylor's plan for the West. For several in the proslavery movement,

²² Walther, *William Lowndes Yancey*, 118-119; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 94-95.

²³ *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., 27-28; Robert Remini, *At the Edge of the Precipice: Henry Clay and the Compromise That Saved the Union* (New York: Basic Books, 2010): 52-53; Michael F. Holt, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004): 66; Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 466-472; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 86-89; Waugh, *On the Brink of Civil War*, 51.

the exceptional nature of government that separated the United States from England had long worn away. Taylor, more by incompetence than by antislavery motive, had merely fulfilled the prophecy of Robert Turnbull's prophecy in the 1830s that the antislavery movement would eventually use the federal government to act against slavery.

During the 1850s, just as the slave population was growing and southern fears of insurrection started gaining currency again, radical abolitionists, both white and black, began delivering lectures and performing plays in the North that praised the Haitian Revolution. Toussaint Louverture again became a hero for many radical abolitionists, with some comparing him to George Washington while others compared him to Napoleon. For abolitionists, Toussaint had evolved into a legendary man of war to be praised for his bloody pursuit of freedom. The discomfiting idea that slavery in America would end in violence started to percolate among the most ardent members of the antislavery movement.²⁴

To many planters, Taylor's actions seemed like a hostile betrayal by one of their own. The slaveholding president had sided with the fanatics who hoped to spark insurrection. Their fears were only confirmed when Horace Mann, a Whig congressman from Massachusetts elected to serve in John Quincy Adams's former seat, responded to the cries of southerners for disunion by telling Congress, "The state of slavery is always a state of war. In its deepest tranquility, it is but a truce," and therefore the insurrection was both inevitable and preferable to the extension of slavery. Without the president uttering a word of disapproval, Mann challenged radical proslavery southerners by inferring that the

²⁴ Matthew Clavin, "A Second Haitian Revolution: John Brown, Toussaint Louverture, and the Making of the American Civil War," *Civil War History* 54 (June 2008): 117-145.

civil war that would inevitably result from secession would spark a slave insurrection. He further stated, "With the creation of every human being, God creates this love of liberty anew. The slave shares it with his master, and it has descended into his bosom from the same high source. Whether dormant or wakeful, it only awaits an opportunity to become the mastering impulse of the soul. Civil war is that opportunity." To southerners who had convinced themselves for decades that outsiders sparked insurrections, no better evidence could be attained of the Abolitionist Power threatening to unleash "servile war" and thereby sparking a second Haiti. The antislavery Whig had made it public knowledge, slavery's defenders believed.²⁵

By the end of 1849 the United States of America desperately cried out for a statesman to lead the nation through another sectional crisis over slavery. The state of Kentucky hoped that it could provide that man, and the state legislature re-elected Henry Clay—who had left the Senate nearly seven years prior—back to his old position. At first reluctant to fill his former role in the upper chamber of Congress, the Great Compromiser quickly made his chief goal the resolution of slavery in the West. Throughout the first half of 1850, Clay hoped to formulate a compromise plan that would allow California to enter the Union as a free state in exchange for concessions to the proslavery elements of Congress. For nearly a year, the Senate chamber resounded with the voices of living legends. Three aging giants, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun, along with two new entrants into the Senate, Jefferson Davis and William Seward, all gave

²⁵ *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., 224; David Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 93-94; Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 52.

brilliant speeches. Clay and Webster fought for unity and compromise, Seward attacked slavery's existence, and Davis and Calhoun defended the South's labor system.²⁶

The proslavery movement's champion orator, Calhoun, had become so weakened by illness during the debate that he could not himself deliver his final major speech to the Senate. Rendered feeble by tuberculosis, the South Carolinian listened to his own words as his friend, Virginia Senator James M. Mason, read Calhoun's closing argument in defense of the expansion of slavery. The dying Calhoun spoke like a convert who now believed that the American system had lost its exceptional nature, due to the "long-continued agitation of the slave question on the part of the North." An equilibrium had been created at the founding of the nation, he argued, that "afforded ample means to each [section] of protecting itself against the aggression of the other." However, as the population of the North outpaced the South, that equilibrium had been destroyed. Free states now dominated slave states, both in the number of states that existed and in the Electoral College. Calhoun blamed the federal ban against slavery in the Northwest Ordinance and the funneling of tax money from imports from the South to the North for creating such a discrepancy in the population of the two sections.²⁷

The dominance of the free states, the South Carolina senator contended, came at the same time that "every portion of the North entertains views and feeling more or less hostile to [slavery]." While "fanatics" saw slavery "as a sin, and consider themselves under the most sacred obligation to use ever effort to destroy it," the "not so fanatical"

²⁶ Remini, *At The Edge of the Precipice*, 37-62; Merrill D. Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987): 431-475.

²⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., 451-452.

still regarded the southern institution "as a blot and a stain on the characters of what they call the nation, and feel themselves accordingly bound to give it no countenance or support." However, Calhoun claimed, southerners understood slavery in a way northerners could never comprehend. "The southern section regards [slavery] as one which cannot be destroyed without subjecting the two races to the greatest calamity, and the section to poverty, desolation, and wretchedness; and accordingly they feel bound by every consideration of interest and safety, to defend it."²⁸ The institution of slavery needed to be protected and supported by the federal government because, as slaveholders had argued for decades, outside "agitation" could spark a race war.

The rest of Calhoun's speech read as if it were Robert Turnbull's prediction from the 1830s. Calhoun contended the exceptional nature of the Union began to weaken when the "fanatical portion of the North," intent on "destroying the existing relation between the two races of the South," tried to spark insurrection by mailing abolitionist pamphlets through the mail. "The South was thoroughly aroused. Meetings were held everywhere, and resolutions adopted, calling upon the North to apply a remedy to arrest the threatened evil."²⁹ Southerners had needed to defend themselves because the North would not.

Congress, the South Carolinian proclaimed, had failed to protect the safety of slavery by not imposing a censorship of mail delivery. "Neither party in Congress had, at that time, any sympathy with" the abolitionist movement. However, northerners, fearing that they would lose votes by not defending free speech, united together to favor the

²⁸ Ibid., 452.

²⁹ Ibid.

reception of petitions. In doing so, Calhoun maintained, the antislavery movement had gained "a position in Congress from which agitation could be extended over the whole Union." Turnbull had been proven right, the gaunt senator told his colleagues in his valedictory address. By not squashing abolitionism in its cradle, the movement had grown powerful. "Instead of being weaker, all the elements in favor of agitation are stronger now than they were in 1835, when it first commenced, while all the elements of influence on the part of the South are weaker."³⁰ The Union would not collapse from a single blow, Calhoun argued, it would just slowly fall apart over time. The Wilmot Proviso had been just one more tear in the fabric of the nation. Calhoun, and those who followed him, opposed Clay's compromise because he believed it was yet another step towards ending slavery in the United States and sparking racial combat in the South.

In less than a month the longtime leader of the proslavery movement would be dead, but his legacy would live on in the form of a radical proslavery movement led by radicals labeled "fire-eaters" who built on his ideas articulated in response to the Wilmot Proviso and the possible prohibition of slavery in the West throughout the 1850s. Their ethos revolved around one principle articulated by one of its chief members, Robert Barnwell Rhett: "The South must protect itself, no slaveholding communities can be safe but by their own energies." The Constitution, which made the United States unique, he maintained, would mean nothing if slavery could be regulated by the federal government. As the Senate continued to debate Clay's compromise plan, several proslavery southerners took to heart Calhoun's call for a convention of southern leaders and

³⁰ Ibid., 453.

organized a meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, to portray a unified front against the antislavery movement. Five states sent an official delegation to Tennessee: Texas, Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina, and Mississippi. Delegates named at local party conventions and caucuses in those states represented four other states—Florida, Alabama, Arkansas, and Tennessee—in an unofficial capacity.³¹

One speech delivered in Nashville by fire-eater Nathaniel Beverley Tucker of Virginia showed that the twin fears of being encircled by free soil and enduring a Haitian-style insurrection persistently hounded southerners. In an address calling for the creation of a new nation comprised only of slave states, Tucker argued that such a southern confederacy should take control of Haiti and make it a repository for free blacks from the South. He stated, "But let a place be found nearer home, where a colony of free blacks may be established under a provincial government, protected, regulated and controlled by a Southern Confederacy, open to all who will go to it, and from its proximity accessible to all....The folly and madness of France have prepared it. It is Hayti."³² The most ardent fire-eaters firmly believed that having a large black population, especially with a free black class, would be

³¹ Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 104-106; Walther, *William Lowndes Yancey*, 119-123; Thelma Jennings, *The Nashville Convention Southern Movement for Unity, 1848-1851* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1980): 105-134. Rhett quoted in Walther, *The Fire-Eaters*, 137; *Charleston Mercury*, September 29, 1848. Another attempt by the fire-eaters to assert its strength came in the form of reopening the international slave trade. However, those attempts were always dismissed throughout the 1850s by northerners and most southerners—even ardent proslavery southerners—alike. See Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 180-181.

³² Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, *Prescience: Speech Delivered By Hon. Beverly Tucker, of Virginia, in the Southern Convention, Held At Nashville, Tenn.*, (Richmond, VA: West and Johnson, 1862) 31-32; Walther, *The Fire-Eaters*, 44-46; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, vol 2, 485.

dangerous to the white South, and they hoped to find a safety valve for excess slaves as the population of the black population of the South continued to grow.

Meeting in June 1850, the timing could not have been worse for those zealous proslavery delegates who hoped to see a significant statement coming out of the Nashville Convention. Though some fire-eaters sought to galvanize the South against any congressional action, most of the attendees still preferred a more moderate approach. As the Senate debated Clay's compromise measures, the Nashville Convention waited. After nine days had passed, the delegates decided against passing any resolution that could be perceived as anti-Union. Instead, the majority favored the extension of the Missouri Compromise line—going against the Calhoun stance that slavery should be legal in all the territory in the West, from Oregon to California—and proposing an idea that had not passed during the initial reaction to the Wilmot Proviso.³³ The Nashville Convention turned out to be more about southern politicians heavily involved in the proslavery movement trying to make a statement rather than actually creating a unified organization that represented the southern people. Without formal delegations from each slave state, the convention was doomed to fail in any attempt to make a significant statement in support of slavery's future in the West. As happened during the Nullification Crisis, most southerners still wanted to wait and see what the future would hold.

Zachary Taylor spoiled any chance of an amicable settlement by acting on his own, rather than giving Clay's compromise the crucial support it needed. Unlike the Missouri Compromise, which had gained support from President Monroe, Clay's

³³ Jennings, *The Nashville Convention Southern Movement for Unity*, 135-166.

new compromise did not sufficiently measure up to Taylor's expectation that California be immediately admitted to the Union despite the firestorm of debate it might incur. Taylor encouraged California to adopt a constitution, which would most likely exclude slavery, thereby enraging proslavery southerners. Old Rough and Ready seemed to view himself as Andrew Jackson and the issue of expansion of slavery outside of the South as nullification. By background a general, Taylor believed in taking decisive action and implementing a solution that his subordinates had to follow. So with a divided Congress and the threat of a veto from the president, Clay's compromise failed to pass in either chamber of Congress.³⁴

Though he did not intend to turn the entire Mexican Cession into one state the way Douglas's plan had intended, Taylor's rigid stance effectively bypassed the Wilmot Proviso through executive order, but to the southern planter class, the result was the same. Taylor's policy gave a reason for the proslavery movement to protest him specifically and the Union in general. Proslavery forces now saw two branches of the federal government—the presidency and the House of Representatives—as being in support of the Wilmot Proviso's restrictions against the extension of slavery in new

³⁴ Richard L. Leonard, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000): 96-99; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 90-99, 106-107; Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 271-272; Remini, *At The Edge of the Precipice*, 37-90. Clay's compromise consisted of eight measures: California would be admitted as a free state; New Mexico would be allowed to vote on the issue of slavery without congressional interference; the state of Texas would relinquish its claim on New Mexico territory; the federal government would assume all of Texas' pre-annexation debt; Congress would declare it "inexpedient" to prohibit slavery in Washington, D.C. while Maryland remained a slave state; the slave trade would be banned in the nation's capital; the fugitive slave law allowing slaveholders to go into free states to capture escaped slaves would be strengthened; and, finally, Congress would have no power under the Commerce Clause of the Constitution to prohibit or obstruct the trading of slaves among the slave states. See, Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007): 63-71, 89-95. Clay's compromise would fail when these resolutions were bundled together in what became known as the "omnibus bill."

American lands. But proslavery arguments about slave insurrection appeared to fall on deaf ears. Unlike the confrontation between Jackson and Calhoun over nullification, Taylor's actions regarding the prohibition of slavery from the West created a broader opposition in which the threat of military action from the president would unravel the Union rather than bring a single rogue state like South Carolina back into the fold. Southern opposition to Wilmot was a feature in nearly every slave state. For many southerners, the possibility of being surrounded by free soil was indeed perceived as a fundamental threat to their way of life and safety.³⁵

President Taylor, however, would never have the chance to enact his plan of settling the question of slavery in the West through executive fiat. The Fourth of July in 1850 was a sunny day of heat and humidity. The president had long been interested in watching the construction of the Washington Monument and celebrating the nation's seventy-fourth birthday. Special speakers had been invited to celebrate the occasion. Most attendees only stayed to listen to the main event—a speech delivered by Senator Henry S. Foote—and to witness the dust from Tadeusz Kościuszko's tomb, a Polish hero of the American Revolution, as it was deposited in the unfinished monument. The president, however, stayed to listen to George Washington's step-grandson also deliver an address. For two hours, the president sat in the heat drinking chilled milk and eating cherries, two foods that doctors had advised the inhabitants of the nation's capital to avoid due to the possibility of their contamination by the Asiatic cholera epidemic. After the president went home, he began to feel ill. Taylor was soon diagnosed with

³⁵ Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore*, 100-104.

gastroenteritis, the stomach flu. On July 9, 1850, the second Whig president to be elected to the White House, like William Henry Harrison before him, died in office. Vice President Millard Fillmore, like John Tyler before him, became an unlikely president.³⁶

Almost immediately on becoming president, Fillmore changed course from Taylor's stance on the issue of California and began to work to pass a compromise in Congress. The man many southerners had derided as an abolitionist when he was paired with the Louisiana slaveholder on the Whig ticket became the South's best hope for protecting slavery in the West. Determined to start his administration without any influence from his predecessor, Millard Fillmore accepted the resignation of Taylor's entire cabinet upon entering office. The new president immediately appointed Daniel Webster, Clay's chief ally, as secretary of state and threw the full weight of his presidency behind finding a way to pass the proposed compromise. He also masterfully defused the growing standoff between Texas and New Mexico by delivering a message that made it clear that he would use presidential force if Texas took steps against New Mexico while promising to refrain until Congress made "appropriate" legal action.³⁷

In August, with the threat of a presidential veto no longer hanging over Clay's compromise bill and the aging Clay himself away from Washington recovering from illness, Stephen Douglas went into action trying to rework the failed resolutions that many had hoped would save the Union. Through parliamentary tricks and political tact, Douglas, remembering that the Missouri Compromise had never been voted on as one

³⁶ K. Jack Bauer, *Zachary Taylor: Soldier, Planter, Statesman of the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1985): 314-316.

³⁷ Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 110; Waugh, *On The Brink of Civil War*, 180.

piece of legislation, separated the omnibus bill and had the Senate vote separately on each resolution. By the first week of September, each part of Clay's compromise laid on the desk of President Fillmore, where he signed them.³⁸

In what the historian David Potter has deemed "the Armistice of 1850," the Illinois senator managed to garner an affirmative vote on every aspect of Clay's bill by forging a small coalition of moderates who wanted compromise with the sectional partisans who would only vote for a bill that favored their worldview. Only three northern senators voted in favor of a strengthened Fugitive Slave Law, while unanimous northern votes carried the bill for the admission of California as a free state despite receiving only six votes in favor from southern senators to eighteen who opposed it. A similar ratio was seen in the voting pattern in the House of Representatives. Clay's compromise passed with little spirit of compromise actually being found in the halls of Congress. Only four senators and twenty-eight congressmen voted in favor of each resolution that made up the so-called Compromise of 1850.³⁹ The stark wedge created by the Wilmot Proviso separated the sections. As the North believed it fought against the Slave Power and the South believed it was seeing the conspiracy of the Abolitionist Power put into place, a large portion of the electorate in both the free states and slave states distrusted each other.

The congressional deadlock caused by the Wilmot Proviso appeared finally to be over. Once the final votes were tallied and the resolutions passed, senators and

³⁸ Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 109-110.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 108-114.

congressmen celebrated. They believed the Union had been saved. Lewis Cass contended, "I think the question is settled in the public mind" and vowed not to give another speech on the subject. Stephen Douglas, too, promised to "never make another speech upon the slavery question in the Houses of Congress." Newspapers encouraged Americans to celebrate. The Wilmot Proviso and the questions it raised in the public—both North and South—had been vanquished. The question had finally been resolved.⁴⁰

The reaction and the debate sparked by the Wilmot Proviso had been decades in the making. The belief that they had avoided civil war and sectional confrontation by passing Clay's compromise as a set of individual resolutions did not change southerners' belief that slavery still needed to expand in order not only to survive as a labor source but also to maintain the security of white society. During the 1850s the fear of slave insurrection actually grew as southerners lost their control over the federal government. During the "Crisis of 1850," for example, Alabama saw mobs rise in towns throughout the state, organizing vigilante groups that attacked those critical of slavery. In one instance, a proslavery editor was censured because he only drove abolitionists out of the state instead of "making a more deliable [sic] mark" on the perpetrators by physically assaulting them. These fears continued to build throughout the decade as the issue of slavery in the West, and the role of the federal government in protecting the southern institution, took center stage of national politics. The conflict stemmed over one major difference: while most northerners outside of the abolitionist movement believed that slavery's expansion and slavery's continued existence in the states could be separated

⁴⁰ Thomas Hart Benton, ed., *Abridgement of the Debates of Congress, from 1789 to 1856*, vol. XVI (New York: D. Appelton and Company, 1861): 601; *Appendix to the Congressional Globe* 31 Cong., 1 sess., 65; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 114-120.

politically and practically, southerners perceived them as one and the same issue.⁴¹

The 1850s, a decade that saw southerners constantly trying to expand where slavery could go while antislavery northerners fought back, has been heavily documented and debated by historians. The southern impulse to defend slavery against "fanatics" who hoped to turn the South into another Haiti helped fuel sectional conflict throughout the decade. In the aftermath of the Compromise of 1850, the proslavery movement made two major attempts to expand slavery, believing that its very existence was at stake. The first was to pass the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which opened the door for the establishment of slavery—through popular sovereignty—in territory north of the Missouri Compromise line, causing uproar in the North and widespread physical violence in what became known as "Bleeding Kansas." The proslavery movement had adopted Calhoun's call for the legalization of slavery everywhere, and many northern politicians who supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act would pay a steep price for their "yes" votes in Congress, losing their congressional seats to candidates who endorsed free soil.⁴²

Secondly, the proslavery movement actively worked to add more territory to the United States. Instead of focusing exclusively on the West, they turned their attention to the Caribbean and Central America, centering on Cuba as the ideal addition to slake the lust of slaveholders who maintained that their institution of

⁴¹ J. Mills Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, 311-314.

⁴² Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 191. Much has been written about the Kansas-Nebraska Act and Bleeding Kansas, see Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2006) and William W. Freehling, *The Road To Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant, volume 2* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 61-144.

labor needed to expand in order to survive in an era of emancipation. Employing privately funded military outfits known as filibusters to spark revolution or conquer territory, the most ardent proslavery forces hoped to wrestle away colonies from European metropolises. The most publicized example of these proslavery missions of conquest involved Cuba. Shortly after the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso, some southerners began to view Cuba as a possible additional slave state that could enter the Union without much controversy. They believed that if a prohibition of slavery had been favored in the West because slavery had long been banned there, slavery would be protected in Cuba because of its long history on the island. These southerners saw Cuba's annexation as another state to be a way to balance the admission of California. The proslavery movement saw that the South could no longer control the House of Representatives; they became determined to maintain power in the Senate.⁴³

Southern politicians from 1848 to 1854 encouraged four different presidents—James K. Polk, Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, and Franklin Pierce—to buy Cuba from Spain. Others in the proslavery movement worked to spark a revolution in the island by promoting a private Cuban junta, hoping an independent Cuba could be annexed in the same fashion as Texas. A revolution, they believed, would allow President Franklin Pierce, a Democrat sympathetic to slaveholders, to

⁴³ Charles H. Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Lives and Times of the Filibusters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980): 26. Southerners would continue to press for a slaveholding empire throughout the Caribbean throughout the 1850s and through secession when the Confederate States of America was established and during the Civil War. See Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973) and Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

make a bid for the island. Pierce was a member of the Young America Movement, whose goal of rapid U.S. expansion easily encompassed the addition of Cuba. In 1853 the president refused to accept a treaty between Spain, France, Great Britain, and the United States that made illegal attacks on the island by private citizens hoping to spark revolution. At the same time, as the president stalled on a treaty regarding filibusters, supporters of annexing Cuba to the United States who planned an invasion of the island in order to detach it from Spain.⁴⁴

The impetus for proslavery action in the Caribbean became greater, however, when Spain, due to pressure from both Great Britain and France, and America's permissive indifference towards filibustering, considered emancipation in Cuba and the arming of black troops to ward off invaders. The Louisiana legislature petitioned Congress, declaring the possibility of abolition coming to Cuba to be "a most pernicious influence upon the institutions and interests, social, commercial, and political of the United States" and stating that the effect of emancipation would be "the sacrifice of the white race, with its arts, commerce and civilization, to a barbarous and inferior race." The Louisianans argued that it was the duty of the federal government to "adopt the most decisive and energetic measures to thwart and defeat a policy conceived in hatred to this republic, and calculated to retard her progress and prosperity."⁴⁵ The sudden threat of a large free black population, less

⁴⁴ Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-1861* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 135-139; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 109-123.

⁴⁵ *House Miscellaneous Documents*, 33 Cong., 1 sess, no. 79; C. Stanley Urban, "The Africanization of Cuba Scare, 1853-1855," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 37 (Feb., 1957): 29-45; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 89-123.

than one hundred miles off of the coast of the slaveholding South, made Cuban annexation an immediate necessity for members of the planter class and their dwindling northern allies.

This quandary resulted in the final major attempt by the proslavery movement to add to the United States more territory where slavery already existed. As northerners began to protest the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and civil war loomed in Kansas between slaveholders and free soilers, the American ministers to France (John Y. Mason), Spain (Pierre Soulé), and England (James Buchanan) devised a plan to annex Cuba during a meeting in the coastal town of Ostend, Belgium, at the suggestion of Secretary of State William Marcy, the former governor of New York. As they drew up the Ostend Manifesto, the three ministers explained why they believed the United States could and should acquire the island of Cuba. Spain, due to its "wretched financial condition," would accept an offer from the Pierce administration for 130 million dollars. However, if Spain refused, the United States could "afford to disregard the censures of the world" in the name of "self-preservation."⁴⁶

The American ministers concluded by stating they believed America now found itself in a perilous situation, one in which "self-preservation" would justify an assault on the island. Just as they had in the 1830s, the proslavery movement justified action by the federal government to protect slavery by connecting it to national security—only this time they added an expansionist twist. The three

⁴⁶ Document XVI, The Ostend Manifesto in Willis Fletcher Johnson, *America's Foreign Relations*, volume II (New York: The Century Co., 1921): 439-441; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 140-141; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 140-141.

ministers maintained, "We should, however, be recreant to our duty, be unworthy of our gallant forefathers, and commit base treason against our posterity, should we permit Cuba to be Africanized and become a second St. Domingo, with all its attendant horrors to the white race, and suffer the flames to extend to our own neighboring shores, seriously to endanger or actually to consume the fair fabric of our Union."⁴⁷ A second "St. Domingo" would also mean a second Toussaint, the perceived slayer of the planter class in the nightmares of the planter class. The same fear that occurred during the Haitian Revolution in the 1790s occurred again in the proslavery movement, this time in the form of the "Africanization" of Cuba inciting the South's black population to rebellion and racial warfare.

The method proslavery forces had used for decades to get their way in a national debate, however, found little success this time around. Wilmot had changed things. Northern politicians no longer genuflected toward political leaders who supported slavery and decried an imminent threat to the Union. The Ostend Manifesto, along with the Kansas-Nebraska Act, received a harsh and negative rebuke by those who lived in the free states. Democratic leaders in the North like Lewis Cass denounced the Ostend Manifesto. In the mid-term election of 1854, President Franklin Pierce and his fellow Democrats would pay a heavy price for supporting the Slave Power, losing seventy-three seats in the House of

⁴⁷ Document XVI, The Ostend Manifesto in Willis Fletcher Johnson, *America's Foreign Relations*, volume II, 441.

Representatives.⁴⁸

The Whigs, however, collapsed entirely. No longer able to create a national coalition because of the stark differences of opinion between northern and southern party members over slavery, southern Whigs joined southern Democrats while northerners left for two new parties that appeared in the North, both of which were viewed as antislavery coalitions—the American Party, which became known as the Know Nothings, and the Republican Party, which had adopted the old free soiler mantra "Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men." The proslavery movement could no longer control the federal government by connecting national defense and the sanctification of the Union to the protection and expansion of slavery. After the harsh rebuke to the expansion of slavery in 1854, the United States would not add and organize another major piece of territory until the 1890s, when Congress finally organized Alaska, purchased in 1867.⁴⁹

One of the final confirmations for the proslavery movement that the Abolitionist Power now controlled of the federal government came in the form of

⁴⁸ Leonard, *The Slave Power*, 190-195; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 192.

⁴⁹ Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 75-102; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. 2, 85-108. For the explanation of the rise of the Republican Party see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Curiously, while the battle, both with words and swords, raged over Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Ostend Manifesto, the Pierce administration without much dispute did add nearly 30,000 square miles of land on the southern border of New Mexico and Arizona in what became known as the Gadsden Purchase, named after James Gadsden who was an ardent member of the proslavery movement who had tried and failed desperately to separate California into two states, one free the other slave, who helped negotiate the purchase of the land from Mexico. Alaska would be bought from Russia in the 1860s, but the area would not be organized into a territory until the 1890s.

the failed presidency of one of its fiercest northern allies, James Buchanan. In the 1856 presidential election, Democrats took advantage of the demise of the Whig Party, winning the presidency by nominating the last ardently proslavery northerner and gaining the unanimous support in the Electoral College from the slave states—something that had not occurred since the "Era of Good Feelings" and the electoral landslide that granted James Monroe his second term. Buchanan was able to garner enough support in the North against his two rivals from the Republican and Know Nothing parties to win a solid majority of the Electoral College with only 45 percent of the popular vote.⁵⁰

A Keystone State politician who encouraged the expansion of slavery to Cuba and Texas and had supported the censorship of antislavery tracts while serving in the Senate during the 1830s abolitionist mail controversy, Buchanan supported two proslavery measures during his presidency that would doom the Democratic Party in the North. He also experienced a third crisis that would make the South question its loyalty to the Union. The first came in the form of the Supreme Court decision *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, in which the court discussed whether or not carrying an enslaved person into free territory automatically freed the slave. Hoping that a proslavery verdict that allowed slaves to be taken into any territory in the United States without changing their status would solve the problems caused by the Wilmot Proviso, Buchanan—as president-elect—corresponded with Supreme Court justices in hopes of influencing the outcome in his favor. In his inaugural address Buchanan specifically identified the question of

⁵⁰ Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 225-266; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. 2, 109-122.

slavery as belonging "to the Supreme Court of the United States, before whom it is now pending, and will, it is understood, be speedily and finally settled." Two days later—in a six to three decision in which only one northerner sided with the majority—the Court issued a broad ruling that in essence legalized slavery everywhere, proclaiming that black people were not protected as people under the Constitution and that free blacks were not to be considered citizens of the United States of America. The Missouri Compromise, the court declared, had been unconstitutional—slavery was a national institution.⁵¹

Antislavery northerners immediately attacked the Court's ruling, declaring that a conspiracy had been developed by the Slave Power to enshrine slavery in the United States without the full consent of the people. The Supreme Court, the critics stated, could not dictate an issue that should be decided in the legislature. The *Scott v. Sanford* decision, which became popularly known as the Dred Scott decision, heightened northerners' acute sense that the Democrats preferred pandering to southern interests to protecting the nation as a whole. No longer could defenders of slavery attract northern sentiment by placing their concerns within a national context. Democrats, especially in the Midwest, became viewed by many northerners as simply tools of the Slave Power who conspired to make the United States a completely slaveholding country.⁵²

Buchanan would cement this view for many northerners by his own actions following the *Dred Scott* decision. During the years that immediately followed the

⁵¹ *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 3 sess., 271-272; Austin Allen, *Origins of the Dred Scott Case: Jacksonian Jurisprudence and the Supreme Court, 1837-1857* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 267-298.

⁵² Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 281-296.

Kansas-Nebraska Act, the territory of Kansas had been the rhetorical and physical battlefield between the proslavery and antislavery movements as each side tried desperately to make the territory into either a slave or free state. In an attempt to quell the confrontation over slavery and settle the question once and for all, President Buchanan searched for a territorial governor who would offer a strong hand in guiding Kansas. He finally settled on long-time friend Robert Walker, who had convincingly swayed northerners to accept Texas annexation as a way to draw enslaved blacks away from the North and towards Mexico.⁵³

In Robert Walker's inaugural address as territorial governor of Kansas, he told the residents that the people, not Congress, would decide whether Kansas would enter the Union as a free or slave state. He declared that any constitution that would be submitted to Congress would have to first be ratified by "actual *bona fide* resident settlers of Kansas" after being drafted by a constitutional convention. Little time passed before his proslavery friends attacked his idea. The Charleston *Mercury* declared, "General Walker is a native of Pennsylvania. He emigrated to Mississippi, and represented that State in the Senate of the United States. He is now a Pennsylvanian again. Neither the Constitution of his native State, Pennsylvania, nor that of his temporarily adopted State, Mississippi, was ever submitted to the people for ratification after being adopted in Convention."⁵⁴

According to the paper, southerners could no longer trust their former allies from the

⁵³ Potter, *The Impeding Crisis*, 298-310; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, volume II*, 130-132; Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 143-144.

⁵⁴ *Inaugural Address of R. J. Walker, Governor of Kansas Territory, delivered in Lecompton, K. T. May 27, 1857* (Lecompton, KS: 1857): 5; Charleston *Mercury*, June 9, 1857. Walker also maintained his view that slavery would eventually erode away from the Upper South and into Mexico. See Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. 2, 129.

North, even the ones who had served as leaders of the proslavery movement just years before. Rhett's words from a few years before seemed to be prescient for many planters: the South itself would have to protect a secure system of slavery.

The vote to create a constitution, however, would not constitute the fair representation of settlers envisioned by Walker. Despite slaveholders' financing of the immigration of yeoman southerners to the Great Plains, the 1857 population of the state was estimated at 17,000 antislavery settlers and only 7,000 proslavery migrants. Any true vote, as Walker promised, should indicate the majority's favor of making Kansas a free state. In 1855, before the massive immigration of free soilers to the West, proslavery citizens from Missouri had ventured to Kansas to declare themselves citizens for one day—Election Day. These one-day residents voted in favor of a heavily proslavery legislature to serve for two years. As Walker was becoming governor and Buchanan hoped to end the bitter fighting between Americans over slavery in the territory, proslavery advocates saw their elected terms coming to an end. Soon, they feared, the new legislature, which would be dominated by those who were antislavery, would vote to make Kansas another free state. If the proslavery leaders wanted to add another slave state in the political climate created by the Wilmot Proviso, they would need to do so soon before they lost control of the territorial legislature.⁵⁵

Proslavery forces in Kansas acted fast. The expiring legislature declared that a state constitutional convention would convene before the 1857 elections. Because of the previous election fraud by southerners, Kansas citizens in favor of free soil shunned

⁵⁵ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. 2, 125-130.

official government elections, including the proslavery-called convention that planned to meet in Lecompton. Free soilers also boycotted the election held to send delegates to Lecompton, resulting in a dominant proslavery contingent at the convention. Predictably, the convention drafted a constitution that allowed slavery in Kansas. The convention delegates also created a maneuver around the electorate that would reject their constitution outright while technically staying within the framework of Walker's ultimatum that the proposed state government would need to be ratified by the people. The convention decided to only put the part of the constitution that allowed the future importation of slaves to a vote: those already held in bondage in the Great Plains would remain in their shackles.⁵⁶

The national response to the Lecompton convention was predictable. Proslavery southerners pointed to the Northwest Ordinance—as Wilmot had done in his attempt to prohibit slavery in the West—and claimed that it had only banned the importation of slaves into the territories instead of freeing those already held in slavery. Antislavery northerners derided the Lecompton constitution as simply a proslavery document. Slaveholders would simply ignore a ban on the importation of new slaves, they insisted. In response to what they viewed as a sham constitution, antislavery Kansans boycotted the ratification vote of Article Seven of the Lecompton Constitution and held their own separate election that took measure of the entire constitution, resulting in the "official" election ratifying the Lecompton constitution's allowance of future slavery in the territory while the unofficial vote overwhelmingly rejected the entirety of proslavery

⁵⁶ The entire saga over the Lecompton constitution is best described in Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 139-167.

constitution.⁵⁷

President Buchanan blundered by playing politics and supporting the anti-democratic Lecompton constitution during a time that called for national leadership. He understood that the base of his party came from the South and believed that supporting slavery would help Democrats remain in power. In protest, Robert Walker resigned while Stephen A. Douglas, outraged at how the president accepted such an abrogation of local democracy, worked to rally northern Democrats against admitting Kansas under the proslavery constitution. When Congress took up the issue, a stark sectional divide appeared—both nationally between the slave states and the free states, and politically between northern Democrats who supported the measure and Republicans and Know Nothings who opposed it. The Senate accepted admitting Kansas into the Union as a slave state by a vote of 33-25; however, the House of Representatives demurred, voting 120-112. In both cases a majority of the North and a handful of southerners in the Upper South voted against the proslavery position. Kansas would not become a slave state.⁵⁸

Despite controlling the presidency and Supreme Court and maintaining a balance in the Senate, the proslavery movement perceived the protection of slavery by the federal government and their northern allies as waning. The Charleston *Mercury* summed up these feelings in its reaction to the rejection of the Lecompton constitution by the House of Representatives. In an article titled "No More Slave States," the leading newspaper of the proslavery movement declared, "The South has suffered a defeat on a vital principle,

⁵⁷ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, volume 2, 134-140; Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 168-189.

⁵⁸ Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, volume 2, 140-141; Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 159-162.

involving her destiny in the Union." The author said that the claims of fraud had been trumped up by "Black Republicans" and used as a "stratagem" to "divert attention from the occupation of an advanced position towards securing Southern subjection and Northern rule. Under the way of an increasing and overshadowing Northern majority, agitation is to go on." Without expansion, the *Mercury* told its readers, "the cordon of hostile sentiment" would slowly strangle slavery to death, "perhaps after a desperate and bloody struggle."⁵⁹ The exceptional nature of the government that had made the American Constitution different from Parliament seemed to have fallen away. Many of their northern allies had abandoned the proslavery movement; the rest, they feared, could no longer resist the antislavery consensus building in the North. As Robert Turnbull had stated in his prophecy nearly three decades before, the newspaper inferred that majority rule would stamp out slavery in the United States just as it had in England, either through a slow strangling death or through violent agitation.

In October 1859 a man deemed the most fanatical of the fanatics carried the battles in Kansas eastward. In an event that stunned the nation, John Brown and his followers, inspired by the Haitian Revolution, planned to spark an enslaved insurrection of their own by unleashing the very spirit of Toussaint in the American South. In the aftermath of the attempted revolt, John Brown's son told the *New York Times* "It is, then, only the body of Toussaint L'Ouverture which sleeps in the tombs; his soul visits the cabins of the slaves of the South when night is spread over the face of nature....the despots of America shall yet know the strength of the toiler's arm, and that he who would

⁵⁹ Charleston *Mercury*, April 5, 1858.

be free must himself strike the first blow." He would attack the oldest slave state in the Union, Virginia, hoping to stab at the heart of the slaveholding ethos. Following in the steps of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner, John Brown came to Virginia with the hope of sparking a revolution.⁶⁰

In the years that had followed the Wilmot Proviso, John Brown had become convinced that violence was the only way for slavery to meet its final end in the United States. While slaveholders worried about slavery's possible prohibition in California, Brown focused on *Dred Scott* and the Fugitive Slave Act as evidence that the federal government still favored the planter class of the South. He chose to make his first major attack against slavery in the South at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Eighteen other men, all of whom had written farewell letters to their families in expectation of death, joined him. Five members of Brown's band of raiders were black, including one whose wife and children still fell under the heavy yoke of bondage. Brown planned to attack the federal arsenal in the town and use its weapons, along with the hundreds of hand-made pikes that he and his troops brought with them, to arm the enslaved around the area. A student of the Haitian Revolution, Brown carefully chose Harpers Ferry because of its proximity to the Appalachian Mountains, just as Toussaint had utilized the Cahos Mountains to conduct a successful guerilla warfare campaign against the French.⁶¹

Brown planned to ignite a revolution. His "Declaration of Liberty," written before

⁶⁰ Matthew Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010): 33-54; *New York Times*, August 8, 1860.

⁶¹ Clavin, "A Second Haitian Revolution," 142-145.

his planned rebellion, proclaimed, "in the course of Human events, it becomes necessary for an Oppressed People to Rise, and assert their Natural Rights." The rest of his declaration resembled that of David Walker's *Appeal*, laying out a history of human outrage and calling for unity against the slaveholding class of the South. American planters had broken the law of God that "requires All Men Shall be" free, Brown stated.⁶² He planned to punish slaveholders for their crimes against humanity. On the night of October 16 that punishment was to begin. As Brown's men approached the armory, the raiders yelled to the night watchman to open the gate that guarded the weapons that had been made for the American military. When he refused, Brown's band used a crowbar to get in, taking captive the lonely guard. Brown looked at his hostage and coldly stated, "I came here from Kansas, and this is a slave State; I want to free all the negroes in this State; I have possession now of the United States Armory, and if the citizens interfere with me, I must only burn the town and have blood."⁶³ The second Haitian Revolution, Brown believed, had begun.

John Brown's raid did not ultimately turn out as he had hoped. There would be no massive insurrection that sparked a revolution. Upon news of Brown's raid, President Buchanan dispatched a detachment of Marines, led by Colonel Robert E. Lee, to Virginia to secure the town. After thirty-six hours of skirmishing that led to a handful of deaths on each side, the federal forces attacked Brown's encampment, in a small brick engine house

⁶² *Governor's Messages and Reports of the Public Officers of the State, of the Board of Directors, and of the Visitors, Superintendents, and Other Agents of Public Institutions or Interests of Virginia*, Document No. 1, (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, 1859): 92-95.

⁶³ *Senate Report*, 36 Cong., 1 sess., no. 278, 22. Tony Horwitz, *Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid That Sparked the Civil War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011): 1-3.

at the train station. After a short standoff, the Marines, led by J. E. B. Stuart, rushed the building. As the American troops approached Brown fired one last shot, killing a Marine. Lt. Israel Greene, the first to encounter John Brown, smashed the cold blade of Greene's military saber against Brown's head, not killing him, but injuring him badly. During the skirmish of Brown's final stand, four of his men were killed while two Marines died in the action. The wounded Brown and the rest of the survivors were taken prisoner. Though the Haitian Revolution would never come to Virginia, Brown's raid had lasting impact in the United States.⁶⁴

A few weeks after being captured, Brown went to court. Despite having attacked a federal armory, the state of Virginia tried the insurrectionist instead of the federal government. Though his defense lawyers had tried to paint their client as insane in order to gain leniency, Brown would have none of it, challenging them in front of the courtroom. He wanted the world to understand that he had acted thoughtfully, striking against the institution of slavery that he hated and hoped to overturn through violence. The insurrectionist prayed that others—both in the antislavery movement of the North and those held in slavery in the South—would adopt his approach. After a five-day trial, Brown was declared guilty. His sentence was death by hanging, scheduled for one month later.⁶⁵

Northerners evinced very little pity in their initial reactions to Brown's failed raid. Outside of antislavery periodicals, newspapers lambasted his efforts. One Connecticut

⁶⁴ Horwitz, *Midnight Rising*, 127-183.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 201-215.

native, for instance, wrote, "We pity the weakness that has made him a fanatic."⁶⁶ Many of his ardent supporters deserted him as he awaited his death. Members of the Secret Six—a group of prominent northerners who supported Brown's expedition—either fled the country or enrolled themselves into an asylum in order to flee scrutiny. Pro-southern newspapers in the North claimed success in putting down the rebellion, in the belief that Brown had indeed intended to spark a revolution in the mountains of Virginia. The New York *Herald* wrote, "Old John Brown made a foray on Harper's Ferry; but he is not likely to repeat the experiment....The enemy's camp is broken up; their leader is in a Virginian prison; their arms and munitions of war have fallen into the hand of the victors; and three or four survivors of the provisional government have fled promiscuously, with prices set upon their heads." The fanatic abolitionists were still the enemy in a war over slavery. Harpers Ferry, for the proslavery movement, appeared to be a victory.⁶⁷

At the beginning of Brown's trial, proslavery newspapers connected the raid on Harpers Ferry to the Haitian Revolution, hoping to show how dangerous someone like Brown could be to the South. The Charleston *Mercury* republished an article from the Baltimore *Sun* that stated, "Brown wanted the citizens of Virginia calmly to fold their arms and let him usurp the government, manumit our slaves, confiscate the property of slaveholders, and without drawing a trigger or shedding blood permit him to take possession of the Commonwealth and make it another Hayti."⁶⁸

Other proslavery newspapers chastised the Republicans as well as Brown. "If our

⁶⁶ New Haven, Ct. *Columbian Register*, November 5, 1859.

⁶⁷ New York *Herald*, November 7, 1859; Horwitz, *Midnight Rising*, 76-79, 208-211.

⁶⁸ Charleston *Mercury*, November 4, 1859.

Northern Browns *shoot* 'freedom' *into* the South, and make slaves masters of *their* masters, as was done in Hayti, then the South will turn out to be as productive as Jamaica or Hayti." The newspaper continued: "If we are not countrymen," the Washington, D.C. *Constitution* told its readers, "New Yorkers, Marylanders, and Virginians—we are neighbors. Our *farms* are near together....Is it right to be scattering firebrands into neighbors' houses, to preach principles in neighbors' households that certainly lead to servile if not civil war?"⁶⁹ Newspapers throughout the South characterized Brown as a religious fanatic. The New Orleans *Crescent* described his actions as part of a larger Abolitionist Power conspiracy led by powerful northerners in the free state mainstream, and said his failed raid portended "vast and powerful ramifications through many states."⁷⁰ Southern planters called for their former northern allies to temper the abolitionist movement before they created a dire state of violence in the slave states that the proslavery movement anticipated.

As John Brown waited one month for the hangman's noose, southerners worried about possible attempts to save Brown. The Virginia governor, Henry Wise, effectively declared marshal law throughout much of his state in the aftermath of the raid on Harpers Ferry. Claiming that he had received credible sources about another impending attack, Wise wrote President Buchanan informing him that he planned to seal the border of his state and formally notified the governors of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Ohio:

⁶⁹ Washington, D.C., *Constitution* November 4, 1859. The *Constitution* had been keeping a close eye on Haiti during the months before, reporting on that country's internal strife as it went through another revolution. See Washington, D.C., *Constitution* April 14, May 6, June 18, July 21, September 6, 17, October 4, 15, 1859.

⁷⁰ Lorman A. Ratner and Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., *Fanatics and Fire-eaters: Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003): 75-77. New Orleans *Crescent* quoted on 76.

"Necessity may compel us to pursue invaders of our jurisdiction into yours." Wise told his fellow governors that his state expected "the confederate duty to be observed, of guarding your territory from becoming dangerous to our peace and safety, by affording places of depot and rendezvous to lawless desperadoes who may seek to war upon our people."⁷¹ Northern allies, many in the proslavery movement feared, could no longer be trusted to defend the South against slave insurrection. The governor, believing he was ensuring his state's safety against a hostile North, posted militia troops near his state's border, watching for a possible insurgency. As with other insurrection scares, the slaveholding South was on high alert.

Governor Wise was warned by fellow slaveholders not to make John Brown a martyr by hanging him. Rather, they argued, he should just spend the rest of his life in a Virginia cell. The governor, however, wanted revenge. There would be no pardon, and Brown hung from the gallows on December 2, 1859. Proslavery southerners' fears, however, did not fall to the ground with his lifeless body. Instead, they interpreted northern responses to Brown's hanging as indications that the North was moving towards abolitionism. On the day of Brown's execution, vigils were held throughout the free states. Americans across the North observed the insurrectionist's death by tolling church bells, attending prayer meetings, delivering glowing oratories, and even offering hundred-gun salutes. Northern newspapers ran full-page stories on the day's events. Throughout the month of his captivity by Virginian authorities, Brown had written letters to supporters and curiosity seekers who contacted him. He knew his role and played his

⁷¹ *Governor's Message and Reports of the Public Officers of the State*, 54; Horwitz, *Midnight Rising*, 243-244.

part perfectly. Northern responses of anger and veneration only grew when readers saw reports of Brown's calm demeanor as he walked to the gallows. One New York newspaper reported that Brown kissed a black baby held up to him by its mother as he left his jail cell.⁷² White southerners viewed the championing by many in the North of the Brown ethos as a sign that they had little problem with his ultimate goal of creating another Haitian Revolution in the United State South. Their once trusted allies appeared to be embracing the greatest fear of slaveholders. The proslavery movement began to anticipate doom for the South if they lost control of the White House and the American military that had prevented Brown's planned insurrection from escalating.

The entire country seemed to feel as though John Brown's raid, capture, and eventual execution changed things. The election of 1860 would prove that sentiment right. The first sign of the collapse of American politics falling into pure sectionalism came in the form of the Democratic National Convention held in Charleston, South Carolina. In the wake of John Brown's raid, the proslavery movement demanded more guarantees from the federal government to protect slavery in the territories. At the opening of Congress in 1859 Senator Jefferson Davis had issued a demand, which the Senate Democratic caucus adopted, that called for a congressional slave code fulfilling the *Dred Scott* ruling. As Democrats met in Charleston in 1860 for the Democratic national convention, Alabama delegates remembered their instructions to walk out of the convention if the Davis resolutions were not specifically included in the party's platform. The delegations of the South likewise vowed to block the nomination of the frontrunner,

⁷² Horwitz, *Midnight Rising*, 225-230, 258-261; Boston *Liberator*, December 2, 1859; New York *Herald*, December 2, 1859; Philadelphia *Public Ledger*; December 2, 1859 Madison *Wisconsin Weekly Patriot*; December 3, 1859 Columbus *Daily Ohio Statesman*, December 3, 1859.

Stephen Douglas—the man who had helped pass the Compromise of 1850—if he failed to include a firm protection of slavery in the party's platform. Sectionalism reigned triumphant.⁷³

The convention lasted ten days, and by its conclusion, the Democratic Party still had no nominee. When they reconvened in Baltimore, sectionalism still predominated, but this time the supporters of Douglas forced through his nomination. In protest, the proslavery southern delegations held their own, smaller convention, nominating Vice-President John C. Breckinridge. The Democratic Party, like the Whigs less than a decade before, had collapsed under the weight of sectional tension. The United States of America no longer had a unified political party that could transcend sectional lines.⁷⁴

For much of the early part of 1860 southern fire-eaters focused most of their political attacks on William H. Seward, the former senator and governor of New York who many presumed to be the frontrunner for the Republican nomination. For example, Edmund Ruffin, who would fire the first shot at Fort Sumter, published a book titled *Anticipations of the Future* that depicted a Seward presidency causing civil war and slave insurrection. An antislavery advocate, Seward had become infamous in the South for delivering a speech in which he deemed the conflict between freedom and slavery "irrepressible." For many in the proslavery movement, John Brown's attack was the logical outcome of prohibiting slavery in the West and in the nation's capital. Though Seward and other Republicans condemned Brown's Harpers Ferry raid, the notion prevailed in the North that he was too much of an antislavery radical to win. In May,

⁷³ Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 403-404.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 407-413.

when the party met in Chicago, the Republicans chose someone else—Abraham Lincoln—because he was considered a moderate who had argued against slavery from the legacy of the Founding Fathers, whom he believed had overwhelmingly been opposed the extension of slavery. In response, Ruffin simply replaced the name of Seward with Lincoln—the ardent proslavery advocates saw no difference.⁷⁵

Though he spoke as though he did not want to influence slavery where it already existed, both Abraham Lincoln and his proslavery critics understood that his goal was to end slavery in the United States. Historian Jonathan Earle has written, "A key to Southerners believing that Republican victory would mean a certain end to their 'peculiar institution' was because so many Republicans made this very point, repeatedly and unceasingly." In the speech that had made him famous and likely gave him the nomination, Lincoln stated that the right to own slaves was not directly protected in the Constitution. Years earlier, Massachusetts Senator Harry Wilson had explained the plan of the Republicans if they assumed control of the federal government: "We shall blot out slavery from the national capital. We shall surround the slave states with a cordon of free states. We shall then appeal to the hearts of men and consciences of men and in a few years we shall give liberty to millions in bondage."⁷⁶ If not as immediate as Wilson declared, Lincoln planned to do the same. For decades southerners had linked the expansion of slavery with its existence in the slave states; antislavery northerners had finally done the same.

⁷⁵ Walther, *The Fire-Eaters*, 260-261; Veron, *Disunion!*, 331-335, Jonathan Earle, "The Political Origins of the Civil War," *OAH Magazine of History* 25, 8-13; Harold Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2004): 128-129.

⁷⁶ Earle, "The Political Origins of the Civil War," 11.

In 1860, the perfect storm finally arose. Given the sectional division of the Democrats, the Republican Party, with its platform of preventing the expansion of slavery into the West, won the presidency and control of the House of Representatives. The election of Abraham Lincoln—the first Wilmot Proviso supporter to become president—directly caused the secession crisis led by South Carolina, the state most fearful of a large slave revolt. Unlike during the Nullification Crisis or the Nashville Convention, other southern states had felt such a growing fear of the restriction of slavery in the West that they followed the Palmetto State out of the Union.

The roots of the proslavery reaction to Abraham Lincoln's election stretched all the way back to the southern response to the Haitian Revolution and the fear of slave insurrection that had initially gripped the South in the 1790s. South Carolina's declaration of causes that addressed why they had seceded specifically invoked the fear of slave rebellion as a major reason for their separation from the Union. The secessionists wrote, "We affirm that these ends for which this Government was instituted have been defeated, and the Government itself has been made destructive of them by the nonslaveholding states....They have encouraged and assisted thousands of our slaves to leave their homes; and those who remain, have been incited by emissaries, books, and pictures to servile insurrection."⁷⁷ With a Republican in control of the White House, proslavery southerners believed that instigation of the slave population, led by "fanatics" who wished to see the South punished for its sin of slavery, would become more prevalent.

⁷⁷ *Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union and the Ordinance of Secession* (Charleston: Evans and Cogswell, 1860): 8-9.

South Carolinians argued that without the support of slavery in the federal government, their entire society would collapse into violent racial warfare, as had been discussed since the beginning of the century. They charged that Republicans gaining control over the machinery of national government had in effect declared "that the South shall be excluded from the common Territory; that Judicial Tribunals shall be made sectional, and that a war must be waged against slavery until it shall cease throughout the United States." For decades proslavery politicians had argued that without expansion, slavery would end in the bloodshed of race war. Without the commitment of northerners to protect their southern brethren from a growing slave population hemmed in by free soil, the secessionists believed "the slaveholding States will no longer have the power of self-government, or self-protection, and the Federal Government will have become their enemy."⁷⁸ Slaveholders believed that with Lincoln in charge, the South would slowly become more like Jamaica, a mere colony to the North that no longer had a say in its own affairs, dependent on a president who did not support their slave society to protect them in times of danger.⁷⁹

For proslavery southerners, it did not matter if Lincoln was a moderate or a "fanatic." What mattered was their belief that the new president would not prosecute abolitionists who threatened the South or help the South if "outside agitators" did indeed spark an insurrection. This belief would stay with the slaveholding South up until the Civil War. One secessionist commissioner from North Carolina, sent to other slave states

⁷⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁹ For an example of this belief see Montgomery *Daily Confederation* March 24, 1860.

in order to help unify the South in secession, claimed in the early days of secession that "to impair the value of slave property in the States by unfriendly legislation" would "render the institution itself dangerous to us, as slaves increase, to abandon it, or be doomed to servile war."⁸⁰ Another secessionist made this point clear at the Virginia convention gathered to debate whether or not the Old Dominion should remain in the Union. He stated, "Expansion with us, [however], is a question of existence. The races cannot be amalgamated; they cannot be severed, their diffusion, under such circumstances, over an area which will prevent a dangerous superiority, in any section, or at any point, of the black race, is a necessity of our position, and essential to the preservation of our civilization itself."⁸¹

Without trustworthy allies in the North on the issue of slavery, many southerners feared the physical destruction of their society. The Union that so many southerners in the 1830s saw as exceptional now looked, in 1860, to be no different from the English Parliament that had banned slavery in the Caribbean. For decades proslavery theorists had warned that any attempt to regulate slavery at the federal level would eventually result in the ending of slavery. Now, the antislavery majority ruled the day. Republicans believed that federal authority over the western territories would allow them to slowly destroy slavery by strangling it to death. That attack on slavery, secessionists believed, undermined the Constitution and everything that had made the American form of government different from the rest

⁸⁰ Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001): 34-35.

⁸¹ *Showdown in Virginia: The 1861 Convention and the Fate of the Union*, eds. William W. Freehling and Craig M. Simpson (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010): 64-65.

of the world. They also anticipated that in the death throes of slavery the slave states would become engulfed in racial warfare, as had happened in the Haitian Revolution, while whites in the North, who "fanatically" supported the destruction of the South's peculiar institution, sat idly by, doing nothing to help.

Radical proslavery supporters expressed exasperation about radical abolitionists gaining control of the mechanisms of the national government and hindering federal protection of southern slavery. Southerners were well aware of the dangers of holding millions of people in slavery and feared a Haitian-style revolution in North America. Being surrounded by free soil, with a Commander-in-Chief who they believed would not assist them during an insurrection, became too much to bear for the fervent supporters of the proslavery movement. By telling all white southerners that Republicans threatened not just slavery but their homes by promoting insurrection, they were able to gain favor in the South. During the debate over secession in Virginia, for example, one delegate claimed, "It is no longer safe for a slave State to remain under that government." Safety was the top priority. This Virginia radical stated, "Take the history of the abolitionized Governments and it is a history of abolitionized people. Look at England, France, Denmark, and at their magnificent Colonies; the pearls of the Antilles, sacrificed without remorse." Numerous secessionists referenced Jamaica and Haiti in comparison to American slavery in the slave states.⁸² Haiti had never left the consciousness of the South from the late eighteenth century onward.

The Constitution deemed so exceptional in the 1830s because it granted power to

⁸² Ibid., 29 See also Jon, L. Wakelyn, ed., *Southern Pamphlets On Secession: November 1860-April 1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996): 186.

slaveholders in America, making them different than their Caribbean counterparts, had now fallen aside, they believed. Southern planters weighed the likelihood of civil war with the North against the uncertainty of staying in a Union controlled by an antislavery political party. Honestly or not, secessionists offered a choice to the southern people that built on decades of history and fear: risk war with the North and its growing antislavery movement by leaving the Union, or prepare to face the uprising of their own enslaved population as the federal government came under control of "fanatics" who hoped to end slavery by any means necessary. In April 1861, sparked by the desperate decision of a fearful proslavery movement, the cannons would be fired at Fort Sumter. The long-prophesied war finally came to the United States of America.

Bibliography

Archival Sources

African American History Collection. William Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mi.

Documenting the South. University Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Nc.

Executive Papers of John Floyd. Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

Farley Family Papers. William Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mi.

Fenno-Hoffman Papers. William Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mi.

Governors' Messages 1783-1870. South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, Sc.

Leckie Family Papers. William Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mi.

Papers of James Henry Hammond. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Tazewell Family Papers. Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

YA Pamphlet Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Government Documents

Acts Passed at a General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Richmond 1831.

An Appendix, a Report on the Trials of Four Whites Persons, on Indictments for

Attempting to Excite the Slaves to Insurrection. Charleston: James R.

Schenk, 1822.

An Official Report of the Trials of Sundry Negroes Charged with an Attempt to Raise an

Insurrection in the State of South Carolina; Preceded by an Introduction

and Narrative; and in an Appendix, a Report on the Trials of Four Whites

Persons, on Indictments for Attempting to Excite the Slaves to

Insurrection. Charleston: James R. Schenk, 1822.

Benton, Thomas Hart. *Abridgement of the Debates of Congress from 1789 to 1856: Dec.*

4, 1843-June 18, 1846, vol. XV (New York: D. Appleton and Company,

1861.

Carter, Clarence, ed. *The Territorial Papers of the United States vol. 9.* Washington:

Government Printing Office, 1940.

Cushing, John D, ed. *The First Laws of the State of Georgia Part 2.* Wilmington, De:

Michael Glazier, Inc, 1981.

Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South

Carolina from the Federal Union and the Ordinance of Secession.

Charleston: Evans and Cogswell, 1860.

Elliot, Jonathan. ed. *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution, as Recommended by the General Convention at Philadelphia, in 1787, Together with the Journal of the Federal Convention, Luther Martin's Letters, Yates's Minutes, Congressional Opinions, Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of '08-09, and other Illustrations of the Constitution* 4 volumes. Washington: 1836.

Flournoy, H. W. *Calendar of the Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts from January 1, 1799 to December 31, 1807* vol. XI. Richmond, 1890.

Governor's Messages and Reports of the Public Officers of the State, of the Board of Directors, and of the Visitors, Superintendents, and Other Agents of Public Institutions or Interests of Virginia. Document No. 1. Richmond: William F. Ritchie, 1859.

Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Bicentennial Edition, Part 2. Washington DC: U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1975.

Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States from George Washington, 1789, to George Bush, 1989. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1989.

Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, *President James Knox Polk, 1845* <http://inaugural.senate.gov/history/chronology/jkpolk1845.cfm>.

Johnson, Willis Fletcher, ed. Document XVI, The Ostend Manifesto. In *America's Foreign Relations*, volume II. New York: The Century Co., 1921.

Journal of the Convention of the People of South Carolina, Held in 1860, 1861, and 1862. Columbia, SC: R. W. Gibbes, 1862.

Journal of the Proceedings of the General Council of the Republic of Texas Held at San Felipe de Austin, November 14th, 1835. Houston, 1839

Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1800. Richmond: Thomas Nicholson, 1800.

Lowrie, Walter and Walter S. Franklin, eds. *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States, From the First Session of the First to the Section Session of the Twenty-Second Congress Class VII.* Washington D.C: Gales and Seaton, 1834.

Manning, William R. ed. *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Series, 1831-1860.* Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1936.

McRae, Sherwin, ed. *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts from August 11, 192 to December 31, 1793 vol. VI.* Richmond, 1886.

Resolutions of the Legislature of Georgia in Relation to the American Colonization Society.

Richardson, James D. *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents vol. 1.* Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896.

Stevens, Michael E. *The State Records of South Carolina: Journals of the House of Representatives, 1792-1794*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

The argument of Benj. Faneuil Hunt, in the case of the arrest of the person claiming to be a British seaman, under the 3d section of the State Act of Dec. 1822, in relation to Negroes, &c. before the Hon. Judge Johnson, Circuit Judge of the United States, for 6th Circuit: ex parte Henry Elkison, claiming to be a subject of His Britannic Majesty, vs. Francis G. Deliesseline, sheriff of Charleston District. Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1823.

U. S. Congress. *Annals of Congress of the United States, 1789-1824*. 42 vols.
Washington DC, 1834-1856.

U. S. Congress. *Appendix of the Congressional Globe of the United States*. 46 vols.
Washington D.C. 1834-1873.

U. S. Congress. *Congressional Globe*. 46 vols. 1834-73.

U. S. Congress. House of Representatives. *Miscellaneous Documents*, 33 Cong., 1 sess,
no. 79.

U. S. Congress. House of Representatives. *Reports*, 27 Cong., 1 sess., No. 3:
Recommending Appropriations for Home Squadron Serial 393
Washington, 1841.

U. S. Congress. House of Representatives. *Documents*, 28 Cong., 1. sess. (serial 446), no
404, 125-144.

U. S. Congress. *Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America* vol. 5.

U. S. Congress. *Register of the Debates of Congress of the United States*.

U. S. Congress. Senate. "Report of the Secretary of the Navy," 27 Cong. 2 sess. no 1/6
serial 395 Washington, 1841.

U. S. Congress. Senate. *Report* 36 Cong., 1 sess., no. 278, 22

U. S. Congress. Senate. *Message from The President of the United States Transmitting
with his Objections, the bill entitled, "An Act to incorporate the
Subscribers to the Fiscal Bank of the United States."* Senate Document 93,
27 Cong., 1 sess., 5.

U. S. Congress. Senate. Memorial of the Legislature of Alabama, Against the measures of
the abolitionists, and against interfering with the subject of slavery in the
District of Columbia S.doc 124.

U. S. Congress. Senate. Resolutions of the Legislature of Kentucky S.doc 249 24 Cong, 1
sess.

U. S. Congress. Senate. Resolutions of the Legislature of Virginia, Adverse to the
movements made for the abolition of slavery, &c, S.doc 233.

Newspapers

Augusta Chronicle and Georgia Advertiser

Alexandria Herald

Army and Navy Chronicle
Austin Texas State Gazette
The American Beacon, Norfolk, Va.
Baltimore Patriot
Baltimore Republican and Argus
Baton Rouge Gazette
Bee, New London, Ct.
Boston Courier
Boston Gazette
Boston Weekly Messenger
Camden Journal
Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser;
Charleston Mercury
Charleston Southern Star
Cincinnati Weekly Herald and the Philanthropist
Columbian Centinel, Boston, Ma.
Columbian Herald, Columbia, Sc.
Columbian Register, New Haven, Ct.
Columbus Daily Ohio Statesman
Constitution, Washington, D.C.
The Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette
Constitutional Whig, Richmond Va.
Connecticut Herald
Cultivator, Hallowell, Me
The Daily Madisonian, Washington, D.C.
Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register, Houston, Tx.
Enquirer, Columbus, Ga.

Farmer's Register
The Friend, New Orleans, La.
The Liberator, Boston, Ma.
Federal Union (Milledgeville, GA)
The Floridian (Pensacola, FL)
Gazette, Hallowell, Me.
The Georgia Telegraph, Macon, Ga.
Greenville Mountaineer
Haverhill, Ma. *Gazette*
Hartford Times
Houston Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register
Jackson Mississippian
Jamestown, New York *Journal*
Journal of Literature and Politic, Portsmouth, Nh.
Lynchburg Virginian
Madison Wisconsin Weekly Patriot
Marshall Texas Republican
Milledgeville Southern Recorder
Milledgeville Federal Union
Montgomery Daily Confederation
Ohio State Journal and Columbus Gazette
Nashville Republican
Nashville Republican and State Gazette
Natchez Courier, Natchez, La.
Natchez Gazette (Natchez, MS)
National Banner and Nashville Whig
New Hampshire Gazette

The Newport Mercury
Niles' Weekly Register
Republican Farmer, Bridgeport, Ct.
New Orleans Times-Picayune
North Carolina Standard (Raleigh, NC)
Norwich Courier
Pendleton Messenger (Pendleton, SC)
Philadelphia Gazette
Philadelphia Public Ledger
Pittsfield Sun
The Portsmouth Journal and Rockingham Gazette
Richmond Enquirer
Richmond Virginia Argus
St. Louis Daily Commercial Bulletin
Salem Gazette
Saratoga Sentinel
Southern Banner, Athens, Ga.
Southern Patriot, Charleston, Sc.
Southern Recorder, Milledgeville, Ga.
Tallahassee Floridian
Texas National Register
Times Picayune, New Orleans, La.
United States Telegraph, Washington, D.C.

Published Primary Correspondence, Diaries, Manuscripts, Speeches, Writings

*A Sketch of The Life and Public Services of General Zachary Taylor the People's
Candidate for the Presidency, with Considerations in Favor of his Election.*

Washington, DC: J. T. Towers, 1848.

Adams, Charles Francis, ed. *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams Comprising Portions of His
Diary from 1795 to 1848.* Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co, 1876.

Adams, John Quincy, *Speech of John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, Upon the Right of
the People, Men and Women, to Petition; on the Freedom of Speech and of
Debate in the House of Representatives of the United States; on the
Resolutions of Seven State Legislatures and the Petitions of More Than
One Hundred Thousand Petitioners, Relating to the Annexation of Texas to
This Union.* Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1938.

*Address adopted by the Whig State Convention, at Worcester, September 13, 1848.
Together with the Resolutions and Proceedings.*

"After Nat Turner: A Letter From the North." *The Journal of Negro History* 55 (April
1970): 144-151.

Barker, Eugene C., ed. *The Papers of Stephen F. Austin* Washington and Austin, 1924-
1928.

Barker, Joseph ed. *The Works of William Ellery Channing in Six Volumes.* London:
Chapman, 1845.

Seager, Robert and Melba Porter Hay, eds. *The Papers of Henry Clay.* Lexington:
University Press of Kentucky, 1984.

Donnan, Elizabeth, ed. *Papers of James A Bayard, 1796-1815*. Washington D.C:

Eleventh Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1913.

Bassett, John Spencer, ed. *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*. 7 vols. Washington, DC:

Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1931.

Bailey, Rufus William. *The Issue Presented In A Series of Letters On Slavery*. New

York: John S. Taylor, 1837.

Bellinger, Edmund. *A Speech on the Subject of Slavery: Delivered 7 September 1835 at a*

Public Meeting of the Citizens of Barnwell District, South Carolina.

Charleston: Dan J. Dowling, 1835.

Benton, Thomas H. *Thirty Years in the Senate or A History of the Working of the*

American Government for Thirty Years From 1820 to 1850 2 vols. New

York: D. Appleton and Company, 1856.

Bleser, Carol, ed. *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern*

Slaveholder. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

Brown, Edward. *Notes on the Origins and Necessity of Slavery* (Charleston: A.E. Miller,

1826)

Brutus [Robert Turnbull]. *The Crisis: or, Essays on the Usurpations of the Federal*

Government. Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1827.

Bushnell, Albert and Hart and Edward Channing, eds. *American History Leaflets*

Colonial and Constitutional. New York: A. Lovell & Company, 1893.

Channing, William E. *A Letter on the Annexation of Texas to the United States*. London: 1837.

Butterfield, L. H. *The Letters of Benjamin Rush* vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951.

Catanzarti, John, ed. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Second Series*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Coulon, Garran. *An inquiry into the causes of the insurrection of the negroes in the island of St. Domingo*. London: J. Johnson, 1792.

Crackel, Theodore J. *The Papers of George Washington* vol. 14. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008.

de Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Ed. Bruce Frohnen. Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2002.

Dew, Thomas R. *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832*. Richmond: T. W. White, 1832.

Dobbin, J. C. *The Wilmot Proviso speech of Hon. J.C. Dobbin, of N. Carolina, delivered in the House of Representatives, February 11, 1847, on the Wilmot Proviso prohibiting slavery in any territories whatever that may hereafter be acquired by the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Blair and Rives, 1847.

Dwight, Theodore. *An Oration, Spoken Before "The Connecticut Society, for the Promotion of Freedom and the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Held in Bondage*. Hartford, 1794.

- Faulkner, James, *The Speech of Charles James Faulkner (of Berkeley) in the House of Delegates of Virginia, On the Policy of the State with Respect to Her Colored Population*. Richmond: Thomas W. White, 1832.
- Freehling, William W., ed. *The Nullification Era: A Documentary Record*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967.
- . and Craig M. Simpson, eds. *Showdown in Virginia: The 1861 Convention and the Fate of the Union*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010.
- Furman, Richard. *Rev. Dr. Richard Furnan's Exposition of the Views of the Baptists, Relative to the Coloured Population in the United States In A Communication to the Governor of South-Carolina 2nd edition*. Charleston: 1838.
- Gardiner, O. C. *The Great Crisis or, Three Presidential Candidates Being A Brief Historical Sketch of the Free Soil Question in the United States, From The Congresses 1774 and '87 to the Present Time*. New York: WM. C. Bryant and Company, 1848.
- Gottschalk, Louis Moreau. *Notes of A Pianist: The Chronicles of a New Orleans Music Legend*. Ed. Jeanne Behrend Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Grant, Ulysses S. *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant, Two Volumes In One*. Old Saybrook, Ct: Konecky and Konecky, 1999.
- Hackett, Mary, J. C. Staff, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Purdue, eds. *The Papers of James Madison Secretary of State Series vol 2*. Charlottesville:

University of Virginia Press, 1986.

Hamilton, James. *An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection Among a Portion of the Blacks of the City*. Charleston: A.E. Miller: 1822.

Harper, Judge. "Memoir on Slavery," *Southern Literary Messenger* 4 (October 1838): 609-636

Harrison, Jesse Burton, "Review: The Slavery Question in Virginia." *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 9. March and April 1833.

Houston, David Franklin, ed. *American History Leaflets, Colonial and Constitutional, November 1893: Ordinances of Secession and Other Documents, 1860-1861* (New York: A. Lovell and Company, 1893)

Kemble, Frances Anne, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839*. Ed. by John A. Scott. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.

Legaré, Hugh Swinton. *The Writings of Hugh Swinton Legaré, Volume II*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1970.

Leigh, Benjamin Watkins. *The Letter of Appomattox to the People of Virginia: Exhibiting a Connected View of the Recent Proceedings in the House of Delegates on the Subject of the Abolition of Slavery*. Richmond: Thomas W. White, 1832.

Lundy, Benjamin and Thomas Earl, *The Life, Travels, and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy Including His Journeys to Texas and Mexico, with a Sketch of*

Contemporary Events, and a Notice of the Revolution of Hayti.

Philadelphia: William D. Parrish, 1847.

McDowell, Jr., James. *The Speech of James McDowell, Jr. (of Rockbridge) in the House of Delegates of Virginia, On the Question.* Richmond, 1832.

McIntosh, James T., ed. *The Papers of Jefferson Davis* vol 3. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981.

Pierce, Edward L, ed. *Memoirs and Letters of Charles Sumner* Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1877.

Pinckney, Thomas. *Reflections, Occasioned by the Late Disturbances In Charleston. By Achates* (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1822)

Polk, Milo Milton Quaife, ed. *The diary of James K. Polk during his Presidency, 1845-1849.* 2 vols. New York: A. C. McClurg & Co, 1910.

Seabrook, Whitmarsh. *A Concise View of the Critical Situation and Future Prospects of the Slaveholding States.* Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1825.

———. *Essay on the Management of Slave, and Especially on Their Religious Instruction, Read Before the Agricultural Society of St. John's Colleton.* Charleston: A.F. Miller, 1834.

Sedgwick, Theodore, ed. *A Collection of Political Writings of William Leggett, volume II.* New York: Taylor and Dodd, 1840.

Stoney, Samuel Gaillard, ed. "Poinsett-Campbell Correspondence (Continued)," *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 42 (Oct., 1941): 31-52.

Stuart, James. *Three Years in North America vol. II*. Edinburgh: Robert Cadell and Whittaker and Co, 1831.

Tragle, Henry Irving, *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1971)

Tucker, Nathaniel Beverley. *Prescience: Speech Delivered By Hon. Beverly Tucker, of Virginia, in the Southern Convention, Held At Nashville, Tenn.* Richmond, VA: West and Johnson, 1862.

Tucker, St. George. *Letter to a Member of the General Assembly of Virginia on the Subject of the Late Conspiracy of the Slaves with a Proposal for Their Colonization*. Baltimore: Bonsal and Niles, 1801.

Tyler, Lyon Gardiner, ed. *The Letters and Times of the Tylers in Two Volumes* Richmond: Whittett and Shepperson, 1884.

Upshur, Abel P. *A brief enquiry into the true nature and character of our Federal Government: being a review of Judge Story's Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States*. Petersburg: Edmund and Julian C. Ruffin, 1840.

Upshur, Abel P. "Domestic Slavery." *Southern Literary Messenger*. 5 (October 1839): 677-687.

U. S. Post Office. *List of Post Offices in the United States, with the Names of Postmasters on the 1st of April 1859; Also the Laws and Regulations of the Post Office Department*. Washington: John C. Rives, 1859.

U. S. Printing Office. *The writings of George Washington from the original manuscript sources, 1745-1799; prepared under the direction of the United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission and published by authority of Congress* vol 33. Washington, D.C., 1931.

Walker, Robert J. *Inaugural Address of R. J. Walker, Governor of Kansas Territory, delivered in Lecompton, K. T. May 27, 1857*. (Lecompton, KS: 1857.

———. *Letter of Mr. Walker, of Mississippi, Relative to the Annexation of Texas: In Reply to the Call of the People of Carroll County, Kentucky, to Communicate His Views on that Subject*. Washington: The Globe Office, 1844.

Wakelyn, Jon L. ed. *Southern Pamphlets on Secession, November 1860-April 1861*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Watson, John F. *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, in the Old Time; Being a Collection of Memoirs, Anecdotes, and Incidents of the City and Its Inhabitants and of the Earliest Settlements of the Inland Part of Pennsylvania, From the Days of the Founders*. Philadelphia: John Penington and Uriah Hunt: 1844.

Weaver, Herbert. ed. *Correspondence of James K. Polk*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1975.

Webster, Noah. *The American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1970.

Webster, "Dissertations on the English Language: with Notes, Historical and Critical." In Evan Kornfeld, ed., *Creating An American Culture, 1775-1800: A Brief History with Documents*. New York: Bedford Publishing, 2001.

Wilson. Clyde N., ed. *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*. 28 vols. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953-2003.

Zuppan, Josephine Little, ed. *The Letterbook of John Custis IV of Williamsburg, 1717-1742*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

Secondary Sources

Alexander, Thomas B. *Sectional Stress and Party Strength: A Study of Roll-Call Voting Patterns in the United States House of Representatives, 1836-1860*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967.

Allen, Austin. *Origins of the Dred Scott Case: Jacksonian Jurisprudence and the Supreme Court, 1837-1857*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006.

Altschuler, Glenn C., and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Ambler, Charles Henry. *Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics*. Richmond: Bell Book and Stationary, 1913.

———. *The Life and Diary of John Floyd: Governor of Virginia, An Apostle of Secession, and the Father of Oregon Country*. Richmond, Richmond Press, 1918.

Ames, Herman V., ed. *State and Federal Relations: The States and the United States*, IV. Philadelphia: Department of History, University of Pennsylvania, 1906.

Anbinder, Tyler. *Nativism and Slavery: The Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s*. New York: Oxford University, 1992.

Appleby, Joyce. *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generations of Americans*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2000.

Aptheker, Herbert. *Abolitionism: A Revolutionary Movement*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989.

———. *American Negro Slave Revolts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1943.

Ashworth, John. *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Atkins, Jonathan M. *Parties, Politics and the Sectional Conflict of Tennessee, 1832-1861*.
Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997.

Ayers, Edward L. *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century
American South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984

Barney, William *The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South*. New
York: Praeger Publishers, 1972.

Baur, John E. "International Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution." *The Americas* 26
(April 1970): 394-418.

Bauer, K. Jack. *Zachary Taylor: Soldier, Planter, Statesman of the Old Southwest*. Baton
Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1985.

Belko, W. Stephen. *The Invincible Duff Green: Whig of the West*. Columbia: University
of Missouri Press, 2006.

Bell, Caryn Cossé. *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in
Louisiana, 1718-1868*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press,
2004.

Belohlavek, John M. *"Let the Eagle Soar!" The Foreign Policy of Andrew Jackson*.
Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985.

Bergeron, Paul H. *Antebellum Politics in Tennessee*. Lexington: University Press of
Kentucky, 1989.

Berlin, Ira. *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South*. New York: The New Press, 1974.

———. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Berwanger, Eugene H. *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1967.

Bishop, Abraham. "The Rights of Black Men," and the American Reaction to the Haitian Revolution," *The Journal of Negro History* 67 (Summer, 1982): 148-154

Brown, Arthur W. *William Ellery Channing*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962

Brown, Charles H. *Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Lives and Times of the Filibusters*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.

Brown, Christopher Leslie. *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Brown, Gordon S. *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.

Buchanan, Thomas C., *Black Life on the Mississippi: Slaves, Free Blacks and the Western Steamboat World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004)

Bynack, V. P. "Noah Webster's Linguistic Thought and the Idea of an American National Culture," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (Jan-March, 1984): 99-114.

Campbell, Randolph B. *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1989.

———. *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Carter, Susan B. "Black population, by state and slave/free status: 1790–1860." In *Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Clary, David A. *Eagles and Empire: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle For A Continent*. New York: Bantam Books, 2009.

Clavin, Matthew. "A Second Haitian Revolution: John Brown, Toussaint Louverture, and the Making of the American Civil War." *Civil War History* 54 (June 2008): 117-145.

———. *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

Cole, Donald B. *Jackson Man: Amos Kendall and the Rise of American Democracy*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004.

- Connolly, Jr, David Hugh. "A Question of Honor: State Character and the Lower South's Defense of the African Slave Trade in Congress, 1789-1807." Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 2008.
- Cooper, William, J. *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983.
- . *The South and the Politics of Slavery. 1828-1856*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978.
- Crapol, Edward P. *John Tyler: The Accidental President*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Craven, Avery O. *The Rise of Southern Nationalism, 1848-1861*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953.
- Crockett Hasan. "The Incendiary Pamphlet: David Walker's Appeal in Georgia." *Journal of Negro History* 86 (Summer 2001): 305-318.
- Crofts, Daniel W. *Old Southampton: Politics and Society in a Virginia County, 1834-1869*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992.
- Crow, Jeffrey J.. "Slave Rebelliousness and Social Conflict in North Carolina, 1775 to 1802," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37 (Jan., 1980): 79-102.
- Da Costa, Emilia Viotti. *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Daly, John Patrick. *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002.

David, Mary Kemp. *Nat Turner Before The Bar of Justice: Fictional Treatments of the Southampton Slave Insurrection*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999.

Davis, David Brion. *The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969.

Deburg, William L. *Slavery and Race in American Popular Culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.

Dew, Charles B. *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001.

———. *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995.

Dickerson, Donna Lee. *The Course of Tolerance: Freedom of the Press in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1990.

Dillon, Merton. *Slavery Attacked: Southern Slaves and Their Allies 1619-1865*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990.

Dubois, Laurent. *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 2004.

———. *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean 1787-1804*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Dubois, W. E. B. *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1904.

Dusinberre, William. *Slavemaster President: The Double Career of James Polk*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Earle, Jonathan H. *Jacksonian Antislavery and Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2004.

———. "The Political Origins of the Civil War." *OAH Magazine of History* 25, 8-13

Eaton, Clement. "A Dangerous Pamphlet in the Old South." *Journal of Southern History* 2 (August, 1936): 512-534.

Egerton, Douglas R. *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

———. *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey Revised and Updated Version*. New York: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2004.

———. "'Its Origin Is Not a Little Curious': A New look at the American Colonization Society." *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (Winter, 1985): 463-480.

———. " 'Why did they not Preach Up This Thing': Denmark Vesey and Revolutionary Theology." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 100 (October 1999): 298-318.

Etcheson, Nicole. *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004.

Eyal, Yonatan. *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-1861*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Faust, Drew Gilpin, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977.

———. *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1982.

———. ed. *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981.

Fehrenbacher, Don E. *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relation to Slavery*. ed. Ward M. McAfee New York: Oxford University, 2001.

Finkelman, Paul. *Millard Fillmore* (New York: Times Books, 2011

Forbes, Robert Pierce. *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Ford, Lacy. *Deliver Us From Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

———. *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Follett, Richard J. "The Sugar Masters: Slavery, Economic Development, and Modernization on Louisiana Plantations, 1820-1860." PhD dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1997.

Foner, Eric. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The ideology of the Republican Party Before The Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

———. "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited," *The Journal of American History* 16, 2 (September, 1969): 262-279.

Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth and Eugene Genovese. *Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Franklin, John Hope, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943.

Freehling, Alison Goodyear, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1982)

Freehling, William. *Prelude to the Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina 1816-1836*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

- . *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854*, vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- . *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* vol. 2. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- . "Denmark Vesey's Peculiar Reality." In *New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Stampp* Ed. by Robert H. Abzug and Stephen E. Maizlish. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986.
- Gatell, Frank Otto, ed. "Postmaster Huger and the Incendiary Publications." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 64 (October, 1963): 93-201.
- Geggus, David P., ed. *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*. University of South Carolina Press, 2001.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World Slaves Made*. New York: Vintage Books, 1976.
- . *The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991.
- Going, Charles Buxton. *David Wilmot: Free-Soiler*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1924.
- Graebner, Norman, A., ed., *Manifest Destiny*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1968.

Green, Michael S. *Politics and America In Crisis: The Coming of the Civil War*. Santa Barbara and other cities: Praeger, 2010.

Greenberg, Kenneth S. *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing As A Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, The Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

———. *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.

Grimsted, David. *American Mobbing: 1828-1861*. New York: Oxford University, 1998.

Guterl, Matthew Pratt. *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Hahn, Steven. *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

———. *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeomen Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Hall, Claude H. *Abel P. Upshur: Conservative Virginian*. Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1964.

———. "Abel P. Upshur and the Navy as an Instrument of Foreign Policy." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 69 (July 1961): 290-299.

- Hamer, Philip. "Great Britain, the United States, and the Negro Seamen Acts, 1822-1848." *Journal of Southern History* 1 (Feb. 1935): 3-28.
- Hammett, Theodore M. "Two Mobs of Jacksonian Boston: Ideology and Interest." *Journal of American History* 62 (March 1976): 845-868.
- Hammond, John Craig. *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007.
- Harding, Vincent. "Symptoms of Liberty and Blackhead Signposts: David Walker and Nat Turner." Kenneth Greenberg, ed. *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Hartnett, Stephen John, *Democratic Dissent and the Cultural Fictions of Antebellum America*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Haynes, Sam W. "Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas: The Quest For National Security," in eds Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997: 115-145.
- Haynes, Steven R. *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Henkin, David M. *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communication in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Hickey, Donald R. "America's Response To The Slave Revolt In Haiti, 1791-1806." *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (Winter 1982): 361-379.

- Hietala, Thomas R. *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire, Revised Edition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Higginson, Stephen A. "A Short History of the Right to Petition Government for the Redress of Grievances." *The Yale Law Journal* 96 (Nov., 1986): 142-166.
- Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. *Travelers and Outlaws, Episodes in American History*. Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1889.
- Hinks, Peter P. *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Slave Resistance*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.
- Holmes, Jack D. L. "The Abortive Slave Revolt of Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, 1795." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 11 (Autumn, 1970): 341-362.
- Holt, Michael F. *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2004.
- . *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*. (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1978)
- . *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Outset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . "The Slavery Issue." In Julian E. Zelizer, Ed. *The American Congress: The Building of Democracy*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004: 189-206.

- Holton, Woody. " 'Rebel against Rebel': Enslaved Virginians and the Coming of the American Revolution." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 105 (Spring, 1997): 157-192.
- Holzer, Harold. *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 2004.
- Horwitz, Tony. *Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid That Sparked the Civil War*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011.
- Howe, Daniel Walker, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- . *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Hunt, Alfred N. *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1988.
- Huston, James L. "Theory's Failure: Malthusian Population Theory and the Projected Demise of Slavery," *Civil War History* 55 (Sept. 2009): 354-381.
- January, Allen F. "The South Carolina Association: An Agency for Race Control in Antebellum Charleston." *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 78 (July 1977): 191-201.
- Jennings, Thelma. *The Nashville Convention Southern Movement for Unity, 1848-1851*. Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1980.

- John, Richard R. *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Johnson, Michael P. "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators." *William and Mary Quarterly* LVIII, 4 (October, 2001): 915-976.
- Johnson, Roy. *The Nat Turner Slave Insurrection*. Murfreesburo, NC: Johnson Publishing Company, 1966.
- Johnson, Walter, ed. *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- . *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Jordan, Winthrop D. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1968.
- Karp, Matthew J. "Slavery and American Sea Power: The Navalist Impulse in the Antebellum South." *The Journal of Southern History* 87 (May 2011): 284-324.
- Killens, John Oliver. *Introduction to The Trial Records of Denmark Vesey*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.
- Lacerte, Robert K. "The Evolution of Land and Labor in the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1820." *The Americas* 34 (April 1978): 449-459.

Lachance, Paul F. "The Politics of Fear: French Louisianans and the Slave Trade, 1786-1809." *Plantation Society in the Americas* I (June 1972): 162-97.

Lewis, W. David. *Sloss Furnaces and the Rise of the Birmingham District: An Industrial Epic*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994.

Link, William. *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Litwack, Leon F. *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Mason, Mathew. *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006.

Mathews, Donald G. *Religion in the Old South*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Matthews, Gelien. *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006.

Matthewson, Tim. *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations during the Early Republic*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003.

———. "George Washington's Policy Toward the Haitian Revolution," *Diplomatic History* 3 (Summer, 1979): 321-336.

———. "Jefferson and the Nonrecognition of Haiti," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 140 (March 1996)

McCurry, Stephanie. *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*.

New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

McPherson, James. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Mann, Mary Tyler Peabody. *Life of Horace Mann*. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1904.

May, Robert E., "Epilogue to the Missouri Compromise: The South, the Balance of Power, and the Tropics in the 1850s," *Plantation Society in the Americas* I no. 2 (June 1972): 201-225.

———. *John A. Quitman: Old South Crusader* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1985).

———. *The Southern Dream of Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973.

Mercieca, Jennifer Rose. "The Culture of Honor: How Slaveholders Responded to the Abolitionist Mail Crisis of 1835." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10 (2007): 51-76.

Merk, Frederick. *Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.

———. *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972.

———. *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967.

Merry, Robert W. *A Country of Vast Designs: James K Polk, The Mexican War, and the Conquest of the American Continent*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009.

Miles, Edwin A. " 'Fifty-four Forty or Fight'—An American Political Legend," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44 (Sept., 1957): 291-309.

———. "The Mississippi Slave Insurrection Scare of 1835." *Journal of Negro History* 42 (Jan., 1957): 48-60.

Miller, William Lee. *Arguing About Slavery: The Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

Montague, Ludell Lee. *Haiti and the United States, 1714-1938*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1940.

Morgan, Edmund S. *American Slavery, American Freedom*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975.

Morison, Samuel Eliot. *The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis: Federalist, 1765-1848* vol. II. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913.

Morris, Charles Edward. "Panic and Reprisal: Reaction in North Carolina to the Nat Turner Insurrection of 1831." *North Carolina Historical Review* pages 29-52 LXII (January 1985): 29-52.

Morrison, Chaplain W. *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967.

- Morrison, Michael A. "Martin Van Buren, the Democracy, and the Partisan Politics of Texas Annexation," *Journal of Southern History* 61 (November 1995): 697-707.
- . *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Munro, Martin and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, eds. *Echoes of the Haitian Revolution, 1804-2004*. Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 2008).
- Mutersbaugh, Burt M. "The Background of Gabriel's Insurrection." *The Journal of Negro History* 68 (Spring, 1983): 209-211.
- Norton, A. B. *Reminiscences of the Log Cabin and Hard Cider Campaign*. Dallas: A. B. Norton, 1888.
- O'Brien, Michael. *A Character of Hugh Legaré*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985.
- . *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Oates, Stephen B. *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion*. New York: Harper and Row, 1975.
- Onuf, Peter. "To Declare Them Free and Independent People: Race, Slavery, and National Identity in Jefferson's Thought." *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 (Spring 1998): 1-46.

- Paquette, Robert L. "Revolutionary Saint Domingue in the Making of Territorial Louisiana." eds. David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus, *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- and Douglas R. Egerton. "Of Facts and Fables: New Light on the Denmark Vesey Affair." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 105 (January 2004): 8-35.
- Pease, William H and Jane H. Pease. "Walker's Appeal Comes to Charleston: A Note and Documents." *Journal of Negro History* 59 (July 1974): 287-292.
- Peterson, Merrill D. *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Peterson, Norma Lois. *The Presidencies of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989.
- Phillips, Ulrich Bonnell. *The Life of Robert Toombs*. New York: The Macmillan Press, 1913.
- Pinheiro, John C. *Manifest Ambition: James K. Polk and the Civil-Military Relations during the Mexican War*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007.
- Porter Kirk H. and Donald Bruce Johnson, eds. *National Party Platforms, 1840-1964*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966.

- Potter, David. *The Impending Crisis: 1841-1861*. Completed and edited by Don. E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper and Row, 1976.
- Ratner Lorman A. and Dwight L. Teeter, Jr. *Fanatics and Fire-eaters: Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Rayback, Joseph G. *Free Soil: The Election of 1848*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1970.
- Remini, Robert V. *At the Edge of the Precipice: Henry Clay and the Compromise that Saved the Union*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.
- Resnick, Daniel P. "The Societe des Amis des Noirs and the Abolition of Slavery" *French Historical Studies* (Autumn, 1972): 558-569.
- Reynolds, Donald E. *Texas Terror: The Slave Insurrection Panic of the 1860 and the Secession of the Lower South* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2007.
- Richards, Leonard L. "Gentlemen of Property and Standing": *Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- . *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination 1780-1860*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000.
- Roark, James L. *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Plantations in the Civil War and Reconstruction*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977.

- Rodriguez, Junius. "Rebellion on the Rivier Road: The Ideology and Influence of Louisiana's German Coast Slave Insurrection of 1811." In *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America*. Eds. John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999.
- Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso Publishing, 1991.
- Rohrbough, Malcolm J. "The California Gold Rush as a National Experience." *California History* 77 (Spring 1998): 16-29.
- Rothman, Adam, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Rugemer, Edward Bartlett. *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008.
- . "Robert Monroe Harrison, British Abolition, Southern Anglophobia and Texas Annexation." *Slavery and Abolition* 28 (Aug. 2007): 169-191.
- . "The Southern Response to British Abolitionism: The Maturation of Proslavery Apologetics." *The Journal of Southern History* 70 (May 2004): 221-248.
- Savage, W. Sherman. "Abolitionist Literature in the Mails, 1835-1836." *The Journal of Negro History* 13 (April 1928): 150-184.

Saxton, Alexander, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Verso Publishing, 1990).

Scarborough, Ruth. *Opposition to Slavery In Georgia Prior to 1860*. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968.

Schwarz, Philip J. "Gabriel's Challenge: Slaves and Crime in Late Eighteenth-Century Virginia." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 90 (July, 1982): 283-309.

Shenton, James P. *Robert John Walker: A Politician From Jackson to Lincoln*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.

Sidbury, James. *Ploughshares Into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity In Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

———. "Saint Domingue in Virginia": Ideology, Local Meanings, and Resistance to Slavery 1790-1800." *The Journal of Southern History* 63 (August 1997): 531-552.

Silbey, Joel H. *Party Over Section: The Rough and Ready Presidential Election of 1848*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009.

———. *Storm Over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Simms, Henry Harrison. *Life of Robert M. T. Hunter: A Study in Sectionalism and Secession* Richmond: The William Byrd Press, 1935.

Skelton, William B. *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992.

Slaughter, Philip. *The Virginian History of African Colonization*. Macfarlane and Fergusson, 1855.

Smith, Elbert B. *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore*. Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1988.

Snay, Mitchell. *Gospel of Disunion*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Staudenraus, P. J. *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.

Sterkx, Herman. *The Free Negro in Antebellum Louisiana*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972.

Taylor, Anne-Marie. *Young Charles Sumner and the Legacy of the American Enlightenment, 1811-1851*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001.

Thornton, J. Mills. *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1978.

Tise, Larry E. *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840*. Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 1987.

Unger, Harlow Giles. *Noah Webster: The Life and Times of an American Patriot*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998.

- Urban, C. Stanley. "The Africanization of Cuba Scare, 1853-1855." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 37 (Feb., 1957): 89-123.
- Varon, Elizabeth. *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Walther, Eric H. *The Fire-Eaters*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992.
- . *The Shattering of the Union: America in the 1850s*. New York: SR Books, 2004.
- . *William Lowndes Yancey: The Coming of the Civil War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Waugh, John C. *On The Brink of Civil War: The Compromise of 1850 and How it Changed the Course of American History*. Wilmington, DL: Scholarly Resources, 2003.
- Wells, Jonathan Daniel. *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class: 1800-1861*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Wilentz, Sean. *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*. New York: W.W. Norton& Company, 2005.
- Wilkins, Joe Bassette. "Widow on Freedom: The South's Response to the Emancipation of the Slaves in the British West Indies, 1833-1861." Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1977.

Winter, William. *Life and Art of Joseph Jefferson: Together With Some Account of His Ancestry and the Jefferson Family of Actors*. New York: Macmillan and Co, 1894.

Wirls, Daniel. " 'The only Mode of Avoiding Everlasting Debate': The Overlooked Senate Gag Rule for Antislavery Petitions," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (Spring, 2007): 115-138.

Wolf, Eva Sheppard. *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006.

Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

———. "The Abolition Postal Campaign of 1835," *Journal of Negro History* 50 (October, 1965): 227-238.

Wyly-Jones, Susan. "The Antiabolitionist Panic: Slavery, Abolition, and Politics in the U.S. South, 1835-1844." Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2000.

———. "The 1835 Anti-Abolition Meetings in the South: A New Look at the Controversy over the Abolition Postal Campaign," *Civil War History* XLVII (2001): 289-309.